



PRIME MINISTER

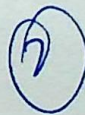
ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

SELECTED SPEECHES

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

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ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

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Volume-II

April 1999 to March 2000

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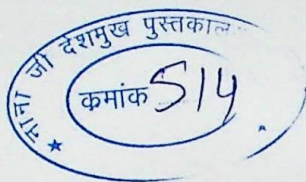


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I

National Affairs

Time to Ponder

WELL, MY COUNTRYMEN, you sent your representatives to the Lok Sabha for five years. They are coming back to you in just 14 months. You know the reason for this as well I do—for the entire drama has been enacted on the open stage.

There was no issue, whatsoever, for bringing down the Government. During the debate in the Lok Sabha, as well as outside, my colleagues and I asked repeatedly: what is the issue on which the Government is guilty of such misconduct that it should be brought down, that the country should be pushed into an abyss? I listened diligently to the debate—as you would have for hours and hours. Not one new fact was brought out, not one issue of any gravity was raised to warrant what was being done.

It was not an issue that propelled those who acted. It was calculation. A calculation that boomeranged. The Government was working well.

- It was taking steps from which earlier Governments had shied away for years—steps to make India strong.
- Even as the worst-ever crisis struck economies of the South East Asian countries, the Government took steps to insulate, to save our economy.
- Having saved it from that typhoon, it took steps to make India prosperous.
- The country was at peace.
- Terrorism was thwarted.

I sometimes wonder: as there was no issue, was the fact that we were doing everything possible to make India strong and prosperous the reason the Government was brought down?

Speech after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, New Delhi, 29 April 1999

When the debate began I asked, "What is the alternative you have in mind? Who is going to lead the new Government? Of whom shall that Government consist?" My questions were scoffed away. We will provide the alternative in five minutes, it was said. In one minute, it was said. Seven days went by, and you saw what happened.

We will tell the President what the alternative is, it was said, we will not tell you. The President held meetings after meetings. And they could not specify an alternative.

In any case, was this the right way to go about a matter of such grave import? As you know, the Government has to handle matters of utmost importance for the life and security of the country. It has to handle matters of the utmost secrecy. There are matters so secret that they are known only to the Prime Minister of our country. It is his duty, when he hands charge to his successor, to inform the latter of these matters. Can it be that in a parliamentary democracy, the House should be asked to vote out a Government and a Prime Minister without knowing in whose hands it will be placing matters of such extreme secrecy and importance? Matters that spell life or death for India? But that is what was done.

Friends, democracy rests on one belief. And that is: when the leaders of a country cannot solve their problems, the people will. That is why the President, after having assessed all possibilities, decided, and the Cabinet concurred, that there was no solution to the current problem except to come back to you.

Such episodes are ruinous for the country. The new election, as our Chief Election Commissioner has told us, will impose a burden of 1,000 crore of rupees on our people. In one week of instability, small investors lost rupees fifty thousand crore. And now, till elections are held, no policy decisions can be taken—even though issues of great urgency are coming up every other week: our negotiations with other countries, our negotiations with international organizations, what we should be doing in

regard to international treaties, decisions relating to the security of the country, decisions that directly affect your welfare.

The world is leaping ahead of us: it is not going to pause and wait for us to settle our internal problems. Our own problems—the enormous growth of population, uncontrolled urbanization, your getting jobs—are not going to slow down just because we do not have a Government in place. This is what we must ponder: is this the way the country should be trifled with?

There is only one way to prevent such episodes from recurring in the future: that is, to remember. Ever so often in the pressure of day-to-day difficulties, ever so often because peripheral issue is deliberately stoked up to divert us, we forget. The old pattern recurs; the entire ruinous sequence is repeated again. And before we know it, another generation is lost.

So my first request to you is: REMEMBER.

Second, our jurists and public men should reflect on the changes that ought to be made in our system to insulate our country from such buffeting. I will give you an example. You have just seen that a Government was removed without the sponsors of that move having worked out any alternative. Under the German Constitution, to remove a Chancellor the House has to vote confidence in another person. In the very act of removing one Chancellor, therefore, his successor is installed. This would be a small change in our system. But even such a small change would have prevented what the country is being put through. There are many such small things that can be done and should be done, and I would appeal to our public men: examine such changes, and place them before the people.

Third—while it is true that in the end the Government was done out by the manoeuvres you have seen, the basic problem lies further back. Because of the divisive turn which politics has been given over the last twenty years, our electorate has

been fractured. This resulted in a fractured Lok Sabha. And that in turn resulted in a situation in which, whichever Government would have been put in place, it would have been vulnerable to the push and pulls of twos and threes. This is the central problem that confronts us today. And the solution to that lies in your hands alone.

- That is my appeal to you:
- Rise above caste.
- Rise above sectarianism.
- Rise above parochialism.
- Rise above the advantage to your immediate group.
- When elections come, DO VOTE.

And vote with only one consideration in mind: The interest of our beloved country.

Hubli-Ankola Railway Line

I AM DELIGHTED to be amidst the people of Karnataka on this happy occasion of starting an important infrastructure project of Indian Railways—namely, the laying of the foundation for the 181-kilometre long railway line to link Hubli with Ankola. This railway line will prove to be a major economic lifeline of Northern and Eastern Karnataka. It establishes a link between the Bellary-Hospet region in the east with the seacoast in the west through the bustling town of Hubli.

In other words, it brings the heart of enormous iron ore reserves closer to the rest of the outside world. This will enable exploitation of Karnataka's enviable natural resources, keeping in view the environmental concerns and the interests of the

Speech at the foundation-stone laying function for the Hubli-Ankola Railway line, Hubli, 17 May 1999

local population.

Equally importantly, this line will establish a much needed rail access to the comparatively backward Northern Karnataka region. It will, thus, open new avenues for employment generation and overall economic prosperity leading to a better quality of life for all.

I, therefore, congratulate the Indian Railways for giving a green signal to this important project.

Although the Hubli-Ankola railway line was approved for construction in 1996-97 itself, the work had not started so far. We have now decided to start construction from today onwards with this formal function. This will involve investment of over Rs. 600 crore.

This project is fully in keeping with our government's commitment to effect not only accelerated economic growth, but also balanced development benefiting all the states of the country. Additionally, it also demonstrates our determination to focus much-needed developmental investments in backward regions.

Infrastructure development is at the core of the overall economic priorities of our Government. The Ninth Five-Year Plan, which was under consideration for finalization for several years, has been adopted by our government. The Plan document reflects the high priority we have attached to road and rail transport.

In the road sector, we have already unveiled the National Integrated Highway project, combining the North-South and East-West corridors. In the railway sector, the recent Railway Budget has presented to the country a bouquet of projects in all parts of the country.

We have also undertaken a number of initiatives to modernize our airport infrastructure, including the construction of an international airport at Bangalore. Indian Railways have traditionally been a reliable vehicle for socio-economic transformation. Their contribution to national integration has been matchless. Projects like Hubli-Ankola railway line also

contribute to the socio-economic integration of Karnataka.

I compliment Indian Railways, their engineers, workers, supporting staff, and all those involved in this project for this endeavour. I convey my best wishes to the people of the region on this happy occasion.

Work for All-round Development of Manipur

I AM HAPPY that it has been possible for me to come to Manipur today. Although I planned to visit this State several times since I took office I could not do so for various reasons. In particular, I wanted to be present at the 5th National Games, which were held for the first time in the North-East.

The people and the government of Manipur did a tremendous job of organizing the National Games so very smoothly and successfully. They deserve our admiration and congratulation. I also applaud the sportsmen and women of Manipur for their excellent performance in the National Games.

I wish to avail of this opportunity to ensure the people of Manipur that the Centre is fully committed to preserve the territorial integrity of Manipur. This is an ancient state with firm links with the main land since the time of the great epics. It has a glorious history and its contribution to Indian culture and tradition is dis-proportionately higher than its size and population. All Indians are proud of the Manipuri dance form as well as the rich tradition of the hill districts. I am glad that there is increasing awareness among the Manipuri youth about its potential to contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of India.

I am here also to reiterate the commitment of the Government of India to rapid and all-round development of the State. The Manipur Government has always been asking for higher investments in the power and communication sectors. Only in the recent past funds were provided for the Leimakhong Power Generating Project under the non-lapsable pool. The Lok Tak downstream hydroelectric project with an estimated cost of nearly Rs. 800 crores will be implemented by the National Hydro-Electric Power Corporation. National Highway 53 which connects Manipur with the rest of the country will be upgraded and completed by 2003.

Among the other important initiatives taken by Government of India at the request of the State Government are: attending to the problems of the Industrial Growth Centre at Lamphal Namphet, which is suffering from non-availability of land; and upgradation of the Regional Institute of Medical Science. The Central Government is also committed to modernization of the police force of Manipur, reimbursement of expenditure incurred in security-related activities and other related proposals from the non-lapsable fund specifically created by my Government for the North-East.

You may be aware about start-up activities for IFAD-funded two districts of Manipur. This multilateral investment in the rural development sector with focus on poverty alleviation has come up in the North Eastern region at the initiative of the Government of India. We are looking for further assistance from both bilateral and multilateral sources for the North Eastern region in the near future. I urge upon the Government of Manipur and the participating community of Manipur to take advantage of this project that aims at empowering the rural community in their problem solution.

Manipur Government has also been encouraged by the Centre to propose to the World Bank for investments in the roads sector under the Manipur State Road Project. I have been given to understand that the progress of project preparation for widening and strengthening of about 200 kilometres of

State roads and major maintenance of another 500 kilometres of similar roads is satisfactory. This project is proposed for effectiveness in the year 2000-2007 and is expected to bring about an external assistance of between Rs. 300-350 crore to the State. I have no doubt that the Manipur Government will take up this work with the seriousness that it merits.

The high level of violence and extortionary activities in the State are a matter of grave concern for me. I am also concerned about the occasional eruption of ethnic clashes among different communities who have shared a grand and common tradition of Manipur. In a democratic set-up there is no place for violence because differences and disputes of all types can be resolved through discussions and dialogue. The Indian Constitution and our democratic polity have the capacity to accept different views of different sections of the population and resolve them in a satisfactory manner.

Finally, a word about the health sector. As you are aware, HIV/AIDS has become a major scourge in the North East, particularly in Manipur. This is probably the biggest health challenge facing the country today. The consequences of ignorance and inaction would be catastrophic. The Centre, the State Governments, the medical community, and the NGOs must work unitedly to counter this grave challenge. I wish to reiterate the Central Government's commitment to give every possible assistance to the State Government and the NGO community of Manipur to counter this scourge. Already, a lot of good work is taking place, for which I congratulate all those involved in the battle against AIDS. However, I urge them to intensify their efforts and not to rest till the spread of HIV-AIDS is fully controlled.

I look forward to the contribution of the people of Manipur and the State Government of the exciting task of nation building and preparing for the next millennium. Your contribution in the past has been invaluable. We look forward to working together in the years ahead with the same enthusiasm.

Greatness is Our Past— Also Our Future

ACCCEPT MY GREETINGS on the sacred occasion of Independence Day. This is a day of hallowed remembrance for us. This is a day of dedication for us.

This year's Independence Day has special significance for all of us. The present century is coming to an end. The world will have entered the next century by the time of the next Independence Day.

As we stand at the sunset of the 20th century, and look back at the events of the era that has passed, we see the end of colonialism from Indian soil to be the most important development. Our great leaders, and many generations of our countrymen, waged a powerful struggle for independence. By doing so, they paved the way for the independence of other countries, too.

We pay our homage to those self-sacrificing and devoted leaders and patriots who struggled for freedom throughout their lives, and, when necessary, even laid down their lives as aahuti (offering) in the great yagya of freedom.

- That is a fact of which we can be legitimately, and immensely proud;
- And it is yet another reason for us to be immensely grateful—to the giants, the patriots who led that struggle, who gave their very lives for it.

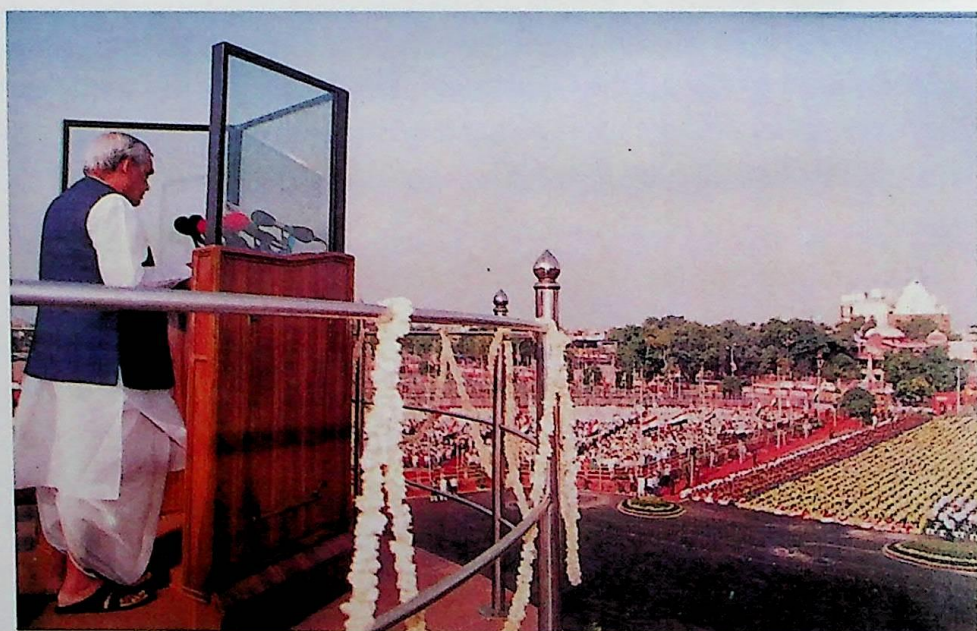
Come, all my countrymen, let us strive to become worthy heirs to those great leaders. We dedicate this sacred day to their memory.

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi to the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort, Delhi, 15 August 1999

In the same way, I offer my condolences to the valiant jawans, officers, and others belonging to the Army and the Air Force, who displayed magnificent heroism and the spirit of sacrifice in recapturing that part of our Motherland in Kargil from the enemy. All of us bow our heads in gratitude for those who were martyred in the Kargil war.

Almost all our countrymen have seen on television glimpses of the impossible summits, which our heroes overcame and pushed out the enemy. To gain victory at such heights is not only to surmount the sky-piercing peaks; it displays the full might of the nation. It is a symbol of the bravery of our armed forces.

How can we forget such heroes? How can we forget those wounded soldiers whose only wish was: how fast can we get well and rejoin our battalion to repulse the enemy? How can we forget the members of the families of those brave martyrs, who, on receiving the body of their beloved, said, "We do not



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee addressing the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort, Delhi, 15 August 1999

have tears in our eyes, we have pride in our heart"? How can we forget the mother whose lament was that she had only one son, and therefore, could not send another to fight for our country?

I know that mere words of solace are not enough. We have to take concrete measures for the families of the martyrs and wounded soldiers so that they may live a life of comfort and dignity. It has been said that we remember and honour soldiers during a war, and in the immediate aftermath. But as the days pass, we forget them. And it is a sad fact that many who sacrificed their lives and limbs in previous wars were often forgotten. I give you my personal pledge that this will not happen again.

This Red Fort and its world-renowned ramparts is not merely a geographical spot. The very heartbeat of India's freedom struggle is linked to this fort and its ramparts. In the First War of Independence of 1857, this is where Bahadur Shah Zafar was held a prisoner. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose made this very fort the target of his campaign in 1943 and, blowing the bugle of Independence, gave the stirring call to his countrymen: "*Dilli Chalo, Chalo Lal Kila*" It is from this very fort that our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru hoisted for the first time, the tricolour of Free India in 1947.

More than half a century has passed. Today, we stand at the threshold of a new era. Come, let us enter this new era united in step and united in resolve.

When I addressed you from this rampart last year, there was uncertainty and cynicism in the atmosphere. It was being asked:

- Will we be able to withstand economic sanctions?
- To what extent will we be able to ward off the economic crisis, which had struck the Tiger economies of South East Asia?
- Will the Government be allowed to carry on its work?

Today, speaking to a self-confident India, I declare:

- Sanctions have lost their effect. They have become a thing of the past. We have dealt with them in such a way that they hardly had any effect on our economy;
- We kept the South-east Asian economic crisis at bay;
- Yes, the Government was brought down, but the country was not. It continued to march ahead, fulfilling the mantra of *Charaiveti, Charaiveti* (Move on, Move on): The Government continued to discharge its duty.
- Most important, a war was imposed on us.

We have not just triumphed over difficulties, we have achieved much, in spite of obstacles that were put in our way:

- Our national income has grown by six per cent;
- Having crossed two hundred million tonnes, production of foodgrains is higher today than ever before;
- Food stocks are higher today than ever. For this our kisans deserve our felicitations. Our agricultural scientists are also worthy of our praise.
- Industrial production is reviving at an energetic pace;
- The new initiatives which have been taken in infrastructure have infused a new purposefulness right across the economy;
- At over thirty billion dollars our foreign exchange reserves are higher than ever before;
- The Sensex in the stock market has risen to record levels. In spite of Kargil, our companies have been able to increase their market value by over Rs. 200,000 crore.
- The off-take of cement for building houses is 22 per cent higher than it has ever been;

- Facilities, which were known only to the rich, to a few, and in our cities alone like insurance for their produce, credit cards are now available to, and are being taken advantage of by common farmers and others in our far-flung villages.

And we are stronger than ever. Pokhran has given us enviable strength and self-confidence, Agni 2 has been tested in the face of pressures and will be integrated into our defence arsenal. PSLV and INSAT 2-E were launched. What a feat our scientists have accomplished: sending not just one, but three satellites on a single rocket far out into space, and placing each of them at the precise point in space, which had been fixed. This has been a magnificent achievement.

Yes, one thing has certainly come down. It is the rate of inflation. At 1.3 per cent, this is the lowest rate in seventeen years.

There has also been a sea change in the way the world sees us. Last year we had taken a major step—Pokhran-2—which was essential for our security, a step which had been contemplated for long but which could not be taken because of the pressures which were put on successive governments. Some did not agree with our assessment. Some even sought to portray us as an irresponsible nation. However today, within a year, in the councils of the world, "India" is synonymous with "responsibility".

The world has seen that we will protect our national interest at all costs; whether it is in developing an atomic weapons capability, whether it is in developing missile-capability, or whether it is in driving adversaries out of our land:

- The world has seen that we will withstand all pressures that are intended to keep us from taking the measures that we consider necessary in our national interest;
- Also the world has seen that whatever we will do will be

for self-defence, never for aggression.

But the world has also seen that we are capable of doing so with utmost restraint, with utmost responsibility. These were the principles which guided us when Pakistan forced the Kargil war on us. Our response was well-thought out. It was effective and left the enemy stunned.

The world today has well realized that we would do whatever is required to protect our country. The world has also understood that we would act with utmost responsibility and restraint even when so gravely provoked. This has raised the reputation of India in the international community.

The Lahore bus journey was taken to improve our relations with Pakistan. This made the world realize that we truly want peace and friendship. This journey was not a showpiece. It was a serious and well-considered move, which we made knowing fully well that there could be risks in it.

Our honesty made an impact on the international community. Later, when the bus to Lahore was taken to Kargil, it did not take much time for the world to realize that Pakistan not only violated the Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration, but it also crossed the borders of trust and goodwill.

That is what turned the world's opinion. Pakistan stood completely isolated on the world stage. India received widespread support in the world for the first time. I do hope that the people of Pakistan too will reflect on these events. We reached out to you with a message of friendship. What did we gain in return? Hundreds lost their lives. Relations were spoilt. The resources which ought to have been used for economic and social development were instead spent on war.

We need peace in order to raise the standard of living of the people in both countries. For peace, we need trust. Has trust increased on account of all that happened in Kargil. Does the path of armed intrusion lead to friendship?

Terrorists are being trained in Pakistan. Camps are being run for them. Hordes of terrorists are being sent into India. They are killing innocent people. They are targeting women and children. How can meaningful dialogue take place in this atmosphere?

Pakistan must realize that no problem can be resolved if it continues to promote terrorist activities. We shall not let the evil designs of terrorists to succeed. Today, Punjab is free of terrorism. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are fed up with terrorism. Even Assam and the North-East is also affected. All of us want peace. People are worried about the future of their children.

Terrorism is a curse on the world. When it is combined with religious extremism, it becomes a graver danger to humanity. All of you are familiar with the saying "*Karela Aur Neem Chadha*" (The bitterness of Karela is further worsened by adding to it the bitterness of Neem.) In our case, over thirty five thousand of our people have been killed by terrorists. Terrorism has become a big problem in many other parts of the world, too. It is obstructing the path of peace and development. Today, there is a need to mobilize world opinion against terrorism.

Today, on the occasion of Independence Day, India stands with full self-confidence. Our gaze is turned to the future. Our standing in the world has risen. Now, the people are not attracted by the controversies and narrow disputes of yesterday.

Throughout the war in Kargil, I was specially satisfied by two features.

- There was no communal tension anywhere in the country. Goodwill and brotherhood prevailed everywhere, including in Jammu and Kashmir. This must have despaired those who thought that riots would break out in India as soon as the spark of war is lit. Those who hatched the conspiracy of strife, must have been truly disillusioned. The people of all sections of society worked for India's success in the

war. A powerful wave of patriotism travelled everywhere.

- When I went to Kargil and met our jawans, I saw our entire country there: men from Nagaland, from Assam, from Tamil Nadu, from almost every state were fighting for the country. There was not the slightest distance between them on account of caste or religion or region.

This is the real India. We must make their oneness our own. We have to live for this India. We have to work for this India. And, if necessary, we have to lay down our lives for this India, as our brave jawans did.

Kargil has, once again, shown that whenever our patriotism is aroused, all of us stand as one with full confidence and determination, as a fist clenched in conviction. We face our challenges unitedly. Our adversaries should beware of this. At the same time, there is an equally important lesson for us. Now that the crisis has been beaten back, do not unclench this fist of unity. The battle is not over. New challenges are knocking at our doors. The patriotism that coursed through the veins of Indians should be made a permanent feature of our lives.

All of us remember the talisman Gandhiji gave us when in doubt about what do. He taught us, think of the least, of the most helpless man you have seen, ask yourself, "Will this step be in his interest?" he said, and you will see all your doubts melt away.

Kargil gives us a second talisman: as we contemplate a step, let us ask ourselves: "Is it worthy of the soldier who gave his life on those mountains? Does the impulse which lies behind it measure up to the spirit which filled that soldier as he fought to protect our Motherland?"

The challenges that confront us cannot be overcome only by the men on the frontiers doing their duty. There is a need for an organized and disciplined nation to stand behind them. We must defend our country and develop our society by keeping national interests utmost in our minds. If our economy

is not strong, and if we are not self-reliant in important matters of national security, then we cannot successfully face external challenges. All of us, wherever we may be, whatever work we may be doing, we should discharge our responsibilities well. We must never allow any limb of our nation or society to become weak. It is clear from the effective way in which we have overcome our challenges and dealt with our difficulties, that we can do anything if we resolve to do it. What is needed is to take a pledge: that whatever we **can** do, we **will** now do.

I have a vision of India: an India free of hunger and fear, an India free of illiteracy and want.

I dream of that India that is prosperous, strong, and caring. An India, that regains a place of honour in the comity of great nations.

- Come, let us build an India in which we have balanced development that benefits all regions and all sections of society. I note with regret that several regions in the country—including the North-Eastern States—have been the victims of unbalanced progress. The nation has an especially pressing obligation to bring the people of the North-East into the developmental mainstream.
- Come, let us build an India in which Dalits, Adivasis, and Backward Classes are not only freed from economic deprivation, but also enjoy the fruits of social justice. The path that will take us to this ideal is the path of *samata*, *mamata*, and *samajik samarasata*.
- Come, let us build an India in which our *nari shakti*—our women—are able to realize their full potential—from shaping the future of their families to shaping the future of the nation. It is our collective responsibility to empower them economically, socially, educationally and also politically. In this regard, I would like to see early passage of the legislation to reserve 33 percent of the seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. We have

already seen how women have given an excellent account of themselves wherever they have had an opportunity to serve in panchayats and other local bodies.

- Come, let us build an India in which the minorities fully enjoy the fruits of national development, while having full opportunities to contribute to it. Our country belongs to all. And all are entitled to equal and fair treatment in the eyes of the law and the Government. India, which is home to the great secular principle of *Sarva Panth Samabhav*, fully guarantees the religious freedom of all communities. It is a matter of immense pride for India that all the religions of the world have a harmonious co-existence here. Unity in Diversity is our priceless heritage.

It is also a matter of much satisfaction that the past year has seen a record low in communal violence.

- India is the largest democracy in the world. The tradition of democracy in our country is very old. When this century opened, democracy was the preserve of just a handful of countries, and even in them it was limited to small sections of the people. Today there are just a handful who are still out of the pale of democracy. There is scarcely a country whose people do not aspire to it.

Come, let us strengthen Indian democracy. Let us make it an ideal for other countries of the world. Let us transform our political democracy into economic and social democracy.

- Come, let us make India a nation of high achievers in every sphere—in business and economy, in education, in science and technology, in arts and culture, and also in sports. Let us make India synonymous with “achievement”, achievement of the kind that can be benchmarked globally. All of us are heartened by what our young men and women have achieved in recent times. The success stories of young Indians working abroad are making headlines

almost every day. If young Indians can script such shining successes abroad, why shouldn't we create conditions for them to do so right here?

Come let us together build a *Parishrami Bharat*, a *Parakrami Bharat*, a *Vijayi Bharat*.

To realize this vision, let us step out of the swamp of negativity.

Let us not be obsessed with the past. Face the future.

March with confidence towards the goal.

Turn from problems — to solutions.

Today, when the 20th century is coming to an end, and the 21st century is knocking at our doorsteps, let us draw inspiration from our glorious past and resolve to build an even more glorious future.

We are inheritors of an ageless culture and a proud civilization. Greatness is our past—and also our future.

Come, let us make good use of the natural and human resources of our Motherland, Bharat and make the 21st century, India's century.

Come, let all of us together raise our voice in saying:

Jai Hind,

Jai Hind,

Jai Hind.

Get Down to the Task of Nation Building

I ADDRESS YOU today to perform a very pleasant duty: to thank all of you for your positive and clear mandate to the National Democratic Alliance and its friendly parties in this election. The NDA represents the aspirations of every region of our great nation and every section of our vibrant society. The NDA, in fact, reflects the spirit of India in all its diversity. It also mirrors the fundamental unity in this diversity. We may have been sent to Parliament under the banners of different parties. But we all have a common commitment: to give India a stable and good government. We are all guided by the lofty principles of secularism, social justice, social harmony, and women's empowerment. Ours is a government wedded to a common ideal: to create a more kind, gentler, and more tolerant society, free from all discrimination, fear, and insecurity.

Free and fair elections are the lifeblood of a democracy. It is a matter of great pride for all of us that our nation has once again demonstrated its unshakable commitment to democracy.

Our nation continues to march on the path she adopted when she became a Republic in 1950. With the successful completion of the last election of this century, India stands taller in the eyes of all democracy-loving people of the world.

It has been a long campaign. A lot of heat and dust were generated during this general election. But now that the election is over, we should put the acrimony and bitterness of the last couple of months behind us, and get down to the task of nation-building. There is not a moment to lose.

The opposition's role in a democracy is no less important

First address to the nation after the Lok Sabha Election, New Delhi, 16 October 1999

than that of the government. It is a role mandated by the people and comes with a lot of responsibility.

Constructive criticism is an essential input for good policies and programmes. Consensus on national issues is necessary for effective action. I look forward to both constructive criticism and consensus on national issues.

My countrymen, the world rushes ahead—whether or not we look up from our narrow concerns.

Neither do the tasks that confront us abate. The number of young women and men whom jobs must be provided continues to increase. Children still go to bed, hungry. A sense of insecurity prevails. The soul of India rebels against this reality.

Starting today, our government has set itself the task of implementing our Agenda for a Proud, Prosperous India. It is my solemn pledge to all of you that nothing shall prevent us from the task of good governance.

We talk of the 21st century. In just ten weeks from today, India, along with the rest of the world, will enter a new era of challenges and opportunities. We are pledged to the emergence of a "new" India in the new century. We can redeem this pledge through collective effort, by resolutely meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities of the 21st century. We may have been sent to Parliament under the banners of different parties. But we have all been sent for a common task: to make India a strong, vigorous, prosperous, and caring country.

To meet the challenges, we have to act now. In the coming days, our government proposes to:

- Speed up economic reforms and focus attention on infrastructure development. The new century demands a new mindset.
- Introduce new laws for financial sector reforms so that India can keep pace with the rest of the world. Evolve a

programme for achieving fiscal rectitude by improved expenditure management, deep tax reforms, and a new mechanism for speedier restructuring and disinvestment of public sector units.

- Promote investment, including foreign direct investment, by adoption of suitable measures and removing bottlenecks that lead to costly delays.
- Re-arrange priorities of development by re-deploying resources, and strengthening institutions for providing to all;
 - Safe drinking water
 - Primary health services
 - Primary education
 - Rural roads
 - Housing to rural homeless. In this task, we seek the participation of the private sector.

All these tasks can be completed if we work together. Let us proceed, as the Gita counsels us, *Bodhyanta parasparam*—imparting wisdom to each other.

The opportunities are unlimited. We can use each one of them to our national advantage if we stand united—both in prosperity and in the face of adversity. India's greatest asset is her unity, and my government is determined to maintain this unity at all cost. One of our immediate tasks will be to firmly put down terrorism which has come to cast its cruel shadow on innocent people. Our message is loud and clear: the life of every Indian citizen under our dispensation is precious. In our fight against terrorism, we will be guided by the principle of "Zero Tolerance".

The same principle of "Zero Tolerance" will apply while dealing with corruption that has bred contempt for the law. One of the first legislations we will take up is the Lokpal Bill so that the rot can be checked from the top.

A broad consensus already exists on electoral reforms to weed out muscle and money power. We propose to soon introduce in Parliament a comprehensive electoral reforms Bill.

We often talk of the future belonging to our youth. But, for decades their problems, especially that of unemployment, have remained unattended. We believe that our young women and men will be the architects of the new India of the 21st century. I am confident that a buoyant national economy will create tremendous employment opportunities. I am equally confident that our focus on education and health will prepare today's youth for tomorrow's challenges.

The Government of free India had set itself the noble task of wiping every tear from every eye, of ending centuries-old discriminations and social inequities. Somewhere along the journey from freedom to the eve of this century, government lost track of that task.

Illiteracy is a curse and a denial of human dignity. As is gender discrimination or, for that matter, lack of something as basic and essential as drinking water and primary health care.

- India today needs a government that cares;
- India needs a government that will reach out to the last person in the last row.

Our government pledges itself to narrowing the gap between our performance and your expectation. The Mandate of 1999 is a bond of trust between people and government. We shall not betray this trust. With the help of a billion people proud of being Indian,

- There is nothing that we cannot achieve;
- No problem we cannot tackle;
- No challenge we cannot face; and,
- No opportunity we cannot seize.

Supreme Court—the Guardian of the Constitution

I AM HAPPY to be in your midst to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Supreme Court of India. This is a historic occasion not only for your Court and all the members of the Bench and the Bar, not only for the Indian judiciary, but also for all the people of India.

The Supreme Court is the supreme temple of justice in India. The concept of Nyaya Devata, which elevates justice to the status of the Divine, is ingrained in Indian culture. On the emblem of the Supreme Court is inscribed the maxim, which defines its role: *Yatho Dharmasthato Jayah* (Triumph is where Dharma, or the right order, is).

Today is also Law Day. It was on this day, fifty years ago, that the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of India. It seems to me, therefore, that the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Supreme Court of India is a fitting curtain-raiser to an even bigger, though related event: the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Indian Republic in the coming year.

The Supreme Court of India is one of the two most important institutions envisaged in the Constitution, the other being the Indian Parliament. It has withstood substantially if not largely or wholly, the test of the past half a century. The performance of the highest institution of the judiciary has been creditable. The nation is proud that the Supreme Court of India has protected the Constitutional order and the Rule of Law.

Our democratic system draws its strength from the fine balance that prevails between Parliament, Executive, and the Judiciary. The Constitution has clearly laid down the specific

Speech at the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Supreme Court of India,
New Delhi, 26 November 1999

responsibilities and powers of the three institutions. All three are subservient to the Constitution and accountable to the sovereign people of India. The more each one of us associated with the three institutions realizes this guiding truth, the better we will be able to serve the noble republican ideals enshrined in our Constitution.

The Indian judiciary, especially the Supreme Court of India, has set high standards, for which you deservedly enjoy deep respect and high status in the eyes of the people. Impartiality of justice has been the hallmark of the history of governance in India. The person occupying the judge's seat must keep—and must be seen to keep—the scale of justice even and not bind himself to any selfish interest.

We have the famous example of a religious debate between Sankaracharya and Mandan Mishra, in which Mandan Mishra's wife was made the judge. Sankaracharya did not object to this fearing that her verdict would go in her husband's favour.

I compliment the Judges for keeping up with the times. You have responded positively to the new concerns and challenges emerging before a dynamically changing nation. Successive generations of judges of the Supreme Court have discharged their responsibility with distinction and aplomb. Our judges can hold the candle to the best in the world. Men and women of the highest character and calibre have graced the Bench, adding to its stature nationally, and to its prestige globally. On behalf of my Government and the people of India, I express my deep appreciation and thanks to all of you.

I take this opportunity to also pay my tributes to the higher judiciary for another important reason. During the Emergency—which was the darkest hour for the Indian judiciary and democracy—some of your brother judges showed exemplary courage in upholding the rule of law and the fundamental rights of citizens. Today, we salute them in grateful remembrance.

Even as we look back to the past half-century with joy and pride on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations, you will agree that this auspicious event also calls for honest

introspection and stock-taking.

Our ancient scriptures considered that Law is the King of Kings and with its help even the weak may prevail over the strong, if the strong is in the wrong. However, it is time for all of us—for those in the Government as well as those in the judiciary—to ask: "Is that the perception of the man in the street? Is that how the victim of crime thinks of our legal system? Is that how a poor illiterate villager who has lost his meagre savings to the machinations of a dishonest debtor, a commercial swindler, or a corrupt public servant feels?"

It is true that much of what is wrong in our public life is due to the acts of omission and commission by the executive at the centre and in States and local bodies. But I will be remiss in my duty, as a people's representative, if I did not express today people's deep dissatisfaction over the pace of dispensation of justice in our country. The legislators, administrators, functionaries of the law and order machinery, and intellectuals share this dissatisfaction.

There is an all-pervasive perception that the Law has become a shield of the unscrupulous. The exasperating and increasingly expensive delays of the judicial system justly invite derision and contempt. More than two crore cases are pending in the subordinate courts of India. Out of these, as many as 32 lakhs are in the High Courts. At a time when we want to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development, India cannot afford justice in slow motion.

Justice delayed is not only justice denied, but as the Katyayana Smriti has warned us long ago, it is also the defeat of Dharma.

"There should be no delay in examining witnesses and deciding cases, for delay is sure to result in defeat of Dharma—that is, miscarriage of justice."

The state of affairs in criminal law is more shocking. It is not very difficult for members of organized gangs to indulge in crime without fear of punishment. The rate of conviction of the accused in various crimes is pathetically low. Big economic offenders almost invariably go scot-free using their considerable resources.

Many undertrials are languishing in our overcrowded prisons for years.

The situation is alarming, to say the least. It calls for earnest and urgent action to stem the rot. In this context, I would like to present some specific ideas, and invite your constructive responses.

ONE: We must put in place alternative dispute settlement mechanisms at all levels of the judiciary. Arbitration is the obvious choice for civil cases. Can we not, by law, force arbitration on a certain class of cases?

TWO: We need to scrap or drastically simplify several outdated laws, particularly the Civil and Criminal Procedure Codes and the Evidence Act, to remove delays and also to make the ordinary litigant understand the processes of justice. In this effort, we would like to make full use of the experience and expertise of the Bench, the Bar, the Law Commission, and other related agencies.

THREE: We need to revitalize the lower courts, to whom the most number of ordinary people come seeking justice. In this, we will be guided by the recommendations of the First National Judicial Pay Commission, whose report I have just received.

I am also aware that many a time delays are caused by government itself. There is an urgent need to curb the strong appetite of our departments, and the lawyers representing them, for casual litigation and for wasting government money. They routinely file cases or defend cases they know are indefensible, and do so only because they do not want to take responsibility. They would rather shift the decision-making on to the courts. Bureaucracy needs to understand that governance is the responsibility of the government.

Our government is under a popular mandate to initiate far-reaching judicial and administrative reforms. We shall soon set up a National Judicial Commission, which will recommend judicial appointments in the Superior Courts and draw up a code of ethics for the judiciary. We are fully committed to the independence of the judiciary.

I am confident that the apex court will steer the Rule of Law in India with vision and foresight in the next century. Working together, let us make our democracy healthier and make our justice delivery system more effective.

I can do no better than to end my speech with the ringing words of M. C. Setalwad, the Attorney General of India, at the inaugural sitting of the Supreme Court of India on January 28, 1950. He said: "The task before us all is the building of a nation alive to its national and international duties, consisting of a strong Central authority and federated units, each possessed of ample power for the diverse uses of a progressive people. In the attainment of this noble end, we hope and trust that this Court will play a great and singular role and establish itself in the consciousness of the Indian people. Like all human institutions, the Supreme Court, we hope, will earn reverence through truth."

Fifty years on, that, I believe, is still the task before the Supreme Court of India.

A Tribute to Our Parliamentary Democracy

WE HAVE GATHERED to confer the outstanding Parliamentarian of the Year Award to Shri Pranab Mukherjee and to Shri Jaipal Reddy, both of whom richly deserve this distinction.

To recognize and honour the talent in both Houses of Parliament irrespective of party affiliations, shows the vibrancy of our Parliamentary system and reflects our commitment to democracy.

Speech while giving away the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award, New Delhi, 17 December 1999

This is all the more so at a time when democratic structure and Parliamentary system are facing crisis in some countries.

Friends, Parliament is the corner-stone of our Republic that will complete 50 years next month. What makes it more relevant is that it affords a platform for both Government and Opposition to debate national issues. Parliament can also be a powerful instrument to forge consensus and cooperation.

I have always held that governance, especially in a country as large and diverse as ours is more than a question of Parliamentary arithmetic. Effective governance is possible when Government and Opposition work together to make Parliamentary democracy a success.

Our Parliament has a tradition of informed, if at times, heated debate. It is this debate that often helps Government to rectify and refine its policies. But, no matter how heated the debate nor how divergent the views of Government and



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee presenting the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award to Shri Pranab Mukherjee, New Delhi, 17 December 1999

Opposition, dignity and decorum need to be maintained. Otherwise, Parliament cannot fulfil its role.

Shri Mukherjee and Shri Reddy are two Parliamentarians who have sat on both Treasury and Opposition benches.

Irrespective of which bench they have sat on they have participated in debates in their own inimitable style.

Shri Mukherjee is professorial; Shri Reddy never at a loss for wit and humour. Both, however, come well-informed. Both can, on occasion use barbs with deadly effect. But rare is the occasion when they have not raised the level of Parliamentary debate in which they have participated.

Their reasoned arguments have helped Members get a better understanding of the issues involved. Government, too, stands to gain from their contribution.

I have known Shri Mukherjee for many years. His vast experience in Government gives him an advantage, which, I must say, he puts to good use now that he is in Opposition.

With nearly three decades of Parliamentary experience to his credit, Shri Mukherjee enriches the Rajya Sabha with his presence. He justly deserves to be honoured with Outstanding Parliamentarian of the Year Award for 1997.

Shri Jaipal Reddy is one of our younger colleagues having made his Parliamentary debut in 1984. It is indeed a fitting tribute to his skills as Parliamentarian, that, in this relatively short span of 15 years, he has been selected for this Award for 1998.

Both in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, Shri Reddy has demonstrated his ability to debate diverse issues with clarity, passion and wit. His robust interventions are ample evidence of the robust health of our Parliament. I warmly congratulate him on being conferred this award.

I commend the Indian Parliamentarians Group for instituting this Award. It is both a recognition of talent and inspiration for others. Above all, it is a tribute to our Parliamentary democracy.

Hijacking of Indian Airlines Plane—An Act of Terrorism

YESTERDAY AN INDIAN Airlines flight from Kathmandu to Delhi was hijacked. Since then, the hijackers have flown from airport to airport, landing at Qandahar in Afghanistan earlier this morning.

My first concern is the safety of the passengers and the crew on board the aircraft. We are doing everything possible to ensure that they return home unharmed.

These last twenty hours have been extremely stressful for the families of the passengers and the crew. I understand and fully share their anxiety.

I also share the anger and grief in the country, particularly over the killing of Rupin Katyal.

I and my colleagues have been constantly monitoring the situation. We are in touch with various countries, as well as the United Nations.

This hijacking is an act of terrorism by desperate men who have no respect for human lives and human rights. It has brought home with full impact the horror of terrorism that the country faces.

We have to face this challenge with determination and self-confidence. My Government will not bend before such a show of terror.

Statement on hijacking of Indian Airlines plane from Kathmandu, New Delhi, 25 December 1999

Make the New Century India's Century

TOMORROW THE WORLD enters a new century and a new age. A new chapter in the history of mankind begins, as the sun sets for the last time in the twentieth century. This is an occasion for cheer and joy. Doubly so because the ordeal of our sisters and brothers, of the little children, held hostage by the hijackers of an Indian Airlines plane is nearing an end. They will soon be back with their families to usher in the New Year.

As you are aware, the hijackers had demanded the release of 36 terrorists. We were able to substantially scale down their demand. In dealing with the hijackers, Government was guided by two concerns: the safety of the passengers and the crew, and the long-term, overall interests of our country. The hijacking, diabolic and evil as it is, is but the latest manifestation. We must not spare any effort, India shall not spare any effort to thwart the phenomenon of terrorism itself. For two decades now, this menace has exacted a cruel price from us in India. Thousands of innocent, defenceless men, women, and children have been done to death. Tens of thousands of families have lost their home and hearth. Surely, the time has come for the world to confront this evil, to act in concert and crush it. The battle against terrorism can be won, by all nations acting together, by outdoing the terrorist in patience, in technology, in strength, and in intelligence. India shall join hands across nations to rid the world of this crime against humanity. Let this be our first resolution for the New Century.

Along with terrorism, the twin curse of poverty and illiteracy have to be wiped out. We have to ensure that every India has a shelter and the poorest of the poor, access to a life of dignity. We have to break down barriers of caste, language,

Address to the nation on the eve of New Year, New Delhi, 31 December 1999

and religion. We have to erase artificial boundaries that separate Indians from Indians. We have to remove all forms of discrimination, especially discrimination against women. The key to this new society is fast economic development and rapid social change. We have to ensure growth with equity so that every Indian benefits from India's prosperity. India shall be a developed country, a country that reaches out and cares for the weakest.

Let this be our second resolution for the New Century.

We have to excel—as individuals and as a nation. We have the best talent in science and technology. Our sportsmen are rated among the best in the world. Our teachers are in demand in the best universities abroad. Our farmers defy great odds to produce record harvests. Our industry has the potential to stand up to all competition.

The closing decades of the twentieth century have fetched a bounty of opportunities. New vistas have been opened up by discoveries that could not have been imagined even twenty years ago. With such talent and resources, we can excel as a nation. We must seize the opportunities of the coming era to emerge as a mighty nation whose strength shall lie in her achievements.

Excellence—that shall be our watchword. Let this be our third resolution for the New Century.

On January 26 we will celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our Republic. The Constitution of India has served as the beacon for our democracy, establishing the rule of law and the supremacy of the people. In fifty years, we have grown to become a vibrant democracy, and the world's largest. But while the spirit of democracy and the faith of the people in a democratic system have survived the test of time, our institutions have begun to show signs of corrosion. That needs to be checked and rectified immediately. To ensure the health of our democracy, our institutions need to be strengthened, with your help, to meet the challenges of the twenty first century.

India's institutions shall be restored to health. Let this be our fourth resolution for the New Century.

Dear Countrymen, we enter the twenty first century with a civilizational history that stretches back to more than five thousand years. From time immemorial, we have nourished traditions and values. They are our real strength. They are the gift India has preserved for the world through ages. They are the truths to which the world has now begun to turn—for direction, for solace, for wisdom. As Sri Aurobindo said:

"The sun of India's destiny would rise and fill all India with its light and overflow India and overflow Asia and overflow the world."

Let us make that vision come true. Let us make the New Century an Indian Century. May 2000 and the decades beyond truly be a new age, a new era of security and brotherhood among all peoples and prosperity for all nations.

Fight Insurgency and Improve Economy

I AM HAPPY to be with you at this conference to discuss development and security issues related to the North Eastern States and Sikkim.

It gives me great pleasure to be in Shillong, all the more so because today happens to be "Meghalaya Day". I convey my warm greetings to the people of Meghalaya on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of their State's formation.

Address at the Conference of Governors and Chief Ministers of North-Eastern States, Shillong, 21 January 2000

Friends, before I proceed with substantive issues, I wish to reiterate my Government's deep and abiding commitment to the rapid economic and meaningful social development of the North Eastern States and Sikkim. The presence of my senior colleagues and officials at this meeting reflects this commitment.

I may also add that this is the first meeting of its kind in the New Year and the new century. That we chose to start our national development initiatives for the year 2000 with this conference, once again shows the importance and urgency we attach to the overall development of the North Eastern States and Sikkim. Our effort is to ensure that these States are soon at par, if not ahead, of the other States of our Union.

One of the reasons why these States are seen to be lagging behind—and, therefore, need a helping hand—is that many of them became a part of the planning process much after the other States. Bearing this in mind, the outlay for these States under the Ninth Plan has been increased to Rs 25,283.52 crore. This is nearly Rs 10,000 crore more than the Eighth Plan outlay of Rs. 15,439 crore.

My Government has also created a pool of non-lapsable funds for the North East and Sikkim. This pool, meant for funding development projects in these States, will fill the resource gap in creation of new infrastructure which is a top priority concern of the Union Government. A committee, headed by the Secretary to the Planning Commission, has been set up to identify the projects. But increased funding alone cannot solve the economic and social problems of the North Eastern States and Sikkim. We need to address other issues that have sapped these States of resources and diverted the attention of the administration. One such issue is that large sums of money do not find their way to the projects for which they are intended. This is a matter of concern. The other issue is non-involvement of the people in development efforts and lack of community participation. I shall revert to this point later.

Last, but not the least, is the issue of insurgency and extortion. The Union Government has been assisting insurgency-

affected States with paramilitary forces and by reimbursing security-related expenditure. But this cannot compensate for the terrible price extracted by insurgents and extortionists at the expense of the region's development or the fear psychosis created by them among the people.

During the conference, I look forward to a purposeful discussion on the issue of insurgency and its socio-economic impact, apart from the manner in which it has affected law and order in these States. If we were to take broad overview of the areas in which the North Eastern States are lacking insofar as development is concerned, we would find that there is an absence of physical infrastructure, inadequate skilled manpower, and insufficient enterprise.

We need to collectively focus our attention on these areas so that today's weakness can be converted into tomorrow's strength. Given the high literacy base of the North Eastern States—I congratulate the people for investing in education—these challenges can be easily overcome.

Human and physical infrastructure development apart, the State Governments of the North Eastern region and Sikkim need to further improve their management of finances so that they can reduce the gap between their non-plan revenue resources. I would however, like to commend some state governments of this region for their prudent fiscal discipline.

Friends, I would like to stress that effective governance is essential for economic development. In order to be effective, the State Governments represented here have to ensure time-bound implementation of projects and transparency in their functioning. This is necessary for people to repose trust in their elected representatives.

India's North East is a kaleidoscope of ethnic and linguistic diversities harmonising themselves into a larger national identity. Each identity aspires for political, social and economic empowerment and we need to fulfil these aspirations within the existing administrative framework. This can be best done by devolution of powers to local bodies and villages

communities through Panchayati Raj and other local self governing institutions like District Councils, thus ensuring people's participation in socio-economic development initiatives.

Regrettably, in some North-Eastern States, as elsewhere, elections to local bodies have not been held for quite some time. This is contrary to the tradition of community-driven initiatives that was once the mainstay of North-Eastern society. I look forward to the revival of that tradition.

The need to involve the people becomes all the more necessary when we see that the growth sectors for the North East in the coming years will be agriculture, horticulture, fish-farming and tourism. These are areas that have the tremendous potential to generate employment opportunities outside the Government. The Union Government's attention is seriously engaged in harnessing the hydro-energy potential of the North East. Not only will this help meet the power requirements of other regions but also create jobs. The power generating potential of this region is more than 31,000 MW, of which only 600 MW has been tapped. Projects to tap another 650 MW will be completed in couple of years.

The Union Government is fully aware of the need to improve road and rail communications in this region. In the last two years, 12 new National Highways have been declared in the North East with a total length of 1,962 km. This will involve a substantial public investment. In addition to these new highways, work has also been taken up for widening the existing critical National Highways.

There is a growing perception that widespread unemployment and lack of employment opportunities are the main factors behind insurgency and criminal activities that have retarded the economic progress of this region. Together, we need to pursue development policies and programmes that generate employment opportunities, though not necessarily in Government sectors.

Friends, we have entered a new era where the success of nations will be measured by their economic and social development. For India to succeed as a nation, each of its

regions should be able to boast of rapid social and economic progress. If any region lags behind, not only will India's progress suffer, but existing regional disparities will further increase. Neither is desirable—not for India, nor for its North-Eastern region.

One of the factors that have impeded economic development in some States of the North East is violence unleashed by insurgents and externally aided separatists and criminals. It is now well established that Pakistan is backing some of these groups as part of its larger gameplan to try and destabilise India. There is also the problem of extortion by groups that have been exploiting the fear psychosis among the people.

It is heartening to note that some State governments have shown laudable determination in confronting these anti-national and anti-social forces. Emboldened by this, the people of these States have begun to come out against insurgency and related crime. However, a lot more remains to be done to create the proper environment for investment and implementation of development programmes.

For instance, the path-breaking new Industrial Policy for the North East seeks to create favourable conditions for capital inflow into this region. I wish to recall attention to the Union Government's notification of July 9, 1999, exempting specific industries in specific areas from paying Central excise taxes for the first 10 years. Our Government stands firmly committed to this exemption and we shall ensure its implementation.

A last point in this regard is to do with the North-Eastern Council. The NEC was set up with great hopes and expectations. I am aware of the fact that the NEC has not lived up to these expectations. We are now determined to ensure that the council is not only revitalised but also meet at least twice a year. This will definitely expedite the development process in the region.

Friends, I look forward to purposeful discussions at this conference over the next two days.

I thank you for providing me with this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you.

The Guiding Spirit of Subhas Chandra Bose

FIRST, ALL OF you raise the slogan of Jai Hind thrice with me—Jai Hind, Jai Hind, Jai Hind.

This slogan of Jai Hind was given to the nation by Netaji. This slogan is highly inspiring; it has the force to unite everyone. To attain Independence the Azad Hind Fauj, which was founded by Netaji, had marched ahead chanting this slogan. Had Netaji not formed the Azad Hind Fauj and before that if our regular forces had not revolted, the British probably would not have quit India so early.

The struggle for Independence was going on but the British were embroiled in another conflict. While they wanted to hoist the flag of democracy in the entire world, they would keep India under slavery. Netaji thought, it was time for a movement. But he had disagreed with Mahatma Gandhi on this issue. Netaji was one of the great leaders of the Congress. He had been unanimously elected its president. He had won for a second time as well when there was a contest. The reason for his disagreement with Gandhiji was over the question and timing of declaring the onslaught against the British. Netaji felt that it was the right time to begin the movement. Why did the British not practise in India what they trumpeted out around the world? If they were really keen to end Hitler's dictatorship then they must give up their own domination over India. But several Congress leaders did not subscribe to this view. Hence, Netaji quit the Congress. But even after quitting the Congress Netaji continued to hold Gandhiji in high esteem. Despite disagreement his respect for Gandhiji never diminished.

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi to mark the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, New Delhi, 23 January 2000

Nowadays, it appears we turn into one another's enemy on minor differences.

We all know just one name of Netaji—Subhas Chandra Bose. But he had several names. He changed his name according to circumstances. When in 1941 he was detained at his home in Calcutta, he did not rest contented like other leaders. He escaped from strict vigil, hoodwinking his guards and the British imperialists in the same way as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had given the slip to Aurangzeb while in his custody. When Netaji disappeared at that time he called himself Maulvi Ziauddin. Netaji adopted the appearance of Maulvi Ziauddin. But that was not enough. When he reached Germany, he called himself Orlando Mezereta. This was his name in Germany. When he reached Japan in a submarine—just imagine the submarine always moved under water defying the dangers of wartime enemy movement—Netaji called himself Commander Maksuda. Netaji's strategy was to devise any possible means to secure the freedom of India.

Netaji knew that the Britishers ruled over us through their army. India is an ancient land. The people of India are mighty, talented, self-abnegating and sacrificing. But they are not united, do not care for their country as much as they should. Netaji wondered if there would be a rebellion in the army on whose strength the Britishers ruled, as had happened in 1857. Netaji formed the Indian National Army, INA, and he wanted to forge ahead India's Independence under its banner. It is an absurd allegation that he had aligned with the Japanese or the Germans. Netaji was a great patriot. He was deeply imbued with the spirit of patriotism. There was no question of his following anyone's dictate. But at that time this was propagated to tarnish his image. Now the propaganda has been proved wrong. Netaji ranks next only to Gandhiji.

There have been several great men in this country. We take pride in them. Mother India abounds in talents and gems. But

Netaji's was an unparalleled personality. Even in that age he had formed a committee to visualize the country's economic development and planning. Today everyone talks of planning. Today no development is possible without planning. But in an era when we were all in bondage, when the battle for freedom was yet to be won decisively, Netaji formed a committee as the then Congress President and conceived the draft map of independent India and initiated its development process in right earnest. This shows the farsightedness of Netaji.

Through his courage, his will and his farsightedness to do something really concrete for the country's Independence even at the cost of his own life, Netaji changed the entire concept of our freedom movement. Some researchers have even gone to the extent of saying that Gandhiji derived inspiration for his "Quit India" movement later on from Netaji. Do or die—Netaji had gone along this path. He might have drowned anywhere in the sea, could have been captured by some foreigners or could have been eliminated by his enemies. But with his indomitable courage, remembering Mother India, the death-defying Netaji not only showed the way to the whole country but also to the new generation.

It is a matter of satisfaction that the Government of India, our Government, has set up a judicial commission to collect all the facts about Netaji. Till date the question remains as to what actually happened to Netaji, where did he go, in which form he is, what fate befell him after the air accident? These questions are repeatedly raised in India. Enquiry committees were set up but none could come out with any satisfactory answers. There have been repeated demands to set up a high-powered committee to impartially investigate the last days of Netaji. The truth should come out. Now a Commission for this has come into being. I appeal to all countrymen to assist the Commission. The Government will also share with the Commission whatever information it has. There will also be

investigations abroad. It must be found out what really happened to our Netaji.

The Government of India is ready to bring the ashes kept in the temple at Rankoji in Japan and enshrine them with honour in the Red Fort. The whole country should be unanimous on the issue. There should be no disagreement on this. The Red Fort reminds us of Netaji. The youth have to come forward now to follow Netaji's path and transform our political freedom into economic and social justice. This is the unfinished task of Netaji. This is also the path to make our freedom meaningful. Also, this is the way to pay homage to Netaji.

I am hopeful when on this day, the 23rd January, Netaji's birth anniversary is being observed within the country and abroad, we pledge to shape India as per the dream of Netaji, make it prosperous and prove ourselves to be his real successors. Thank you all. Once again, I call upon you to raise the slogan with me — Jai Hind, Jai Hind, Jai Hind.

Basic Structure of Our Constitution Remains Inviolable

YESTERDAY INDIA CELEBRATED the Golden Jubilee of Republic Day. Today we have gathered here to commemorate this historic occasion. Fifty years ago, in this very hall, our Constitution was adopted. That event was a culmination of our

Speech in Parliament to mark the Golden Jubilee of Republic Day, New Delhi, 27 January 2000

people's long suppressed aspiration for freedom; of an arduous, protracted struggle for self-governance.

The journey of the creation of our Constitution has closely paralleled the journey of our Freedom Movement in the early half of the last century.

Members will recall that the "Commonwealth of India Bill", prepared by Indians in 1924, was an important initial milestone. This was followed by the preparation of the "Swaraj Constitution". A new dimension was added to that effort with the Fundamental Rights Declaration in 1931. Following many ups and downs, the Non-Party Conference prepared a comprehensive Constitutional scheme in 1944-45. Unfortunately, that was nipped in the bud. At last, the Constituent Assembly was set up. Thereupon, the Constitutional Advisor to the Constituent Assembly prepared the Draft Constitution. The Draft was subjected to a clause-by-clause consideration in Committees—headed by Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel, and other luminaries. From the discussions in the Drafting Committee headed by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to the deliberations—as intense as they were intensive—in the Constituent Assembly as a whole, it was one unbroken quest for perfection.

Indeed, it was a saga. Even as they were being lashed by riots, killings, oppression, and imprisonment, our leaders kept at the task decade after decade. To read the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly and its committees even today, even after fifty years, is to be overwhelmed by:

- The earnestness with which they approached the task;
- The insight they brought to bear on each Article;
- The farsightedness with which they anticipated the situations and problems that were likely to arise;
- The singular touchstone by which they judged every

provision—always guided by the interest of our country and our people;

- How, engulfed as they were by the aftermath of Partition, by riots, by an invasion, by the urgent task of integrating the States—how they would abstract themselves from this tumult, gather in this very hall, and weigh, and deliberate, and fashion, and refashion, clause after clause.

We are beneficiaries of their sacrifices; we should never forget that.

We are heirs to that legacy—of exclusive, overarching devotion to the national interest; of reasoned, civil disclosure; of harmonizing disparate views.

We should never forget that.

There is one great test for a Constitution, for any system of Governance. It must deliver and it must be durable.

Our Constitution has stood this test. And one reason it has been able to do so is that it embodies a masterly balance; between the rights of the individual and the requirements of the collective life; between the States and the Union; between providing a robust structure and flexibility.

Our Constitution has served the needs of both India's diversity and her innate unity. It has strengthened India's democratic traditions.

But even in the mightiest fort one has to repair the parapet from time to time, one has to clean the moat and check the banisters. The same is true about our Constitution.

Five decades after the adoption of the Constitution, India is faced with a new situation. The need for stability, both at the Centre and in the States, has been felt acutely. The people are impatient for faster socio-economic development. The country

is also faced with a pressing challenge to quickly remove regional and social imbalances by reorienting the development process—to benefit the poorest and the weakest.

That is the purpose for which a Commission to review the Constitution is proposed to be set up. The basic structure and the core ideals of our Constitution, however, will remain inviolate.

Let us not forget that in the end a Constitution is only as good as the ones who work the institutions, which they have set up.

Participating in the Constituent Assembly debates, Dr. Ambedkar had said:

“I feel, however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depend are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics.”

There is widespread apprehension today that our institutions are not working as the Constitution intends, that the conduct of those of us who run them is not what the proper functioning of those institutions requires.

Let this be our resolve today:

- We shall leave institutions—above all, our Parliament and our State Legislatures—for the coming generation in a condition vastly better than the condition in which we found them;

- In discharging our duties in them, our conduct will be such, as would have done the Founding Fathers proud.

That would be a fitting way to repay our debt to them.
That would be the one tribute worthy of them.

II

Economic Development



Transparency and Accountability—Test of Good Governance

I AM HAPPY to be with you this morning to inaugurate your conference. I have been associated, in some form or the other, with your work for as long as I have been a Parliamentarian. I know how critical is the work that you do.

Transparency and accountability are the test of good governance. Not only do they ensure the efficacy of the activities and programmes of the government, but they also establish its credibility in the eyes of those who elect it. Credibility is as important for the moral legitimacy of the government as majority support is for its political legitimacy.

Indian democracy has therefore, created a strong institutional framework for adherence to the norms of transparency and accountability. Keeping track of where and how—the government has spent the taxpayers' money, is among the most important duties of legislators.

The legislature cannot perform this Constitutional role without the efforts of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India and all those who work under him, especially the Accountants General of the states.

It is their painstaking work, done without fanfare, that tells MLAs and MPs whether the money that they had voted for was spent for the purpose that it was voted for. I congratulate the community of Accountants General—both present and past—for their distinguished service to the Nation.

We expect the Accountants General to implement the

Speech while inaugurating the 20th Conference of Accountants General, New Delhi, 7 April 1999

national motto "Satyameva Jayate". The pursuit of truth without fear and favour, without consideration for person or office, is the reason why the founding fathers of our Constitution established this office as a statutory entity. They also made it independent from the executive, so that it could perform its role without any pressure or interference.

I have been the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament twice. I know what a difficult job it is to scrutinize the central government's expenditure that is now running into hundreds of thousands of crores.

The Accountants General of the states have an even more difficult job. They have to record both the revenue and the expenditure of the state government. And they work in conditions not always conducive to efficiency. I am sure that this conference will be discussing ways and means to improve the efficiency of their work.



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee inaugurating the 20th Conference of Accountants General, New Delhi, 7 April 1999

I would like to use this opportunity to share my thoughts on how to better achieve the objectives of a public audit. An audit is always a post-mortem—in that it is undertaken after the expenditure has been incurred.

Yet, it enables the government and, also, the public to learn from how the money was spent, assess the outcome against the targets, and fix responsibility for those who misused taxpayers' money.

Therefore, after the audit report is prepared, it is placed before Parliament or state legislatures. It is followed by an action taken note by the concerned government on.

However, experience shows that in India this does not achieve the desired results. Governments do not always place all the records before the auditors, despite the relevant law stating that the auditors shall have access to whatever they want.

Some state governments delay tabling the CAG's report for many months. As a result, there is little interest and, I may add, time left for MLAs to discuss a document that pertains to expenditure incurred many months ago. Until it is tabled, it cannot be released to the public or the press.

The Public Accounts Committee often finds it difficult to go through in detail all the reports that it gets. The Public Accounts Committee can only recommend remedial action to the government. Acceptance and implementation of the recommendation is the prerogative of the government.

Consequently, the financial control that the legislature is supposed to exercise over the executive is weak. This results in an increasing number of scams and other examples of misuse of government money.

Those who perpetrate them know that first, they are not likely to be caught; and, even if they are, unless it is a large amount, it will simply be buried in one of the paragraphs of a report that is not always read and acted upon.

The serious flaws of omission and commission in the use of public resources are the main reason why developmental projects—especially those in the social sector—have failed to deliver the expected results.

This has to change. My government is committed to improved adherence of the tenets of transparency and accountability in all the ministries and departments. We have to ensure that every information that the government auditors call for must be provided at the earliest.

Expenditure management in government has suffered for too long on account of a narrow and unthinking obsession with mechanical book balancing. I believe that the efficacy of public expenditure should be measured by the public good that it produces or fails to produce.

Public audit should, therefore, be output-driven rather than purely input-oriented. This will also help in better personnel assessment, enabling the government to reward high-performers and penalize gross under-performers.

Rules and procedures of public audit have to keep pace with the changes in the economy with the advent of liberalization.

Many government-owned organizations in the productive sector of the economy have to compete with their counterparts in the private sector. The two cannot be governed by fundamentally different audit regimes.

In rapidly changing market conditions, what makes the difference between success and failure is the ability to take the right decision and, also, the speed of decision making.

Inflexibility of procedures and lack of functional independence in the public sector would therefore, place it at a clear disadvantage over the private sector. I believe this to be an important area of PSU reforms that brook no delay.

As we approach the next century, I believe it is the strength

of our institutions that will protect us from the highly competitive times in which we live. I for one have full faith in our institutions and have always tried to foster them.

With these words, I inaugurate the 20th Conference of the Accountants General.

Have Faith and Confidence in the Future of India

I AM PLEASED to be with you this morning to inaugurate your Annual Session and to attend your national conference.

While participating in the CII's inaugural session last year, I had wondered whether doing so comes with a price tag. After all, for the third consecutive year a different prime minister had inaugurated this event.

Your warm welcome and the kind words spoken about me by your president, Shri Shah, make me doubly aware of the heavy burden of people's trust in me.

I have received an outpouring of affection and warmth from people all over the country and from all strata of society—from boardrooms to *bastis*. It encourages me and reinforces my faith and confidence in our great country.

In the past thirteen months, we have made an honest effort to live up to the people's expectations. All I say to my countrymen today is: "Have faith and confidence in the future of India. The clouds of uncertainty and instability will pass. Together, we shall take India into the 21st century as a strong, self-confident, and prosperous nation."

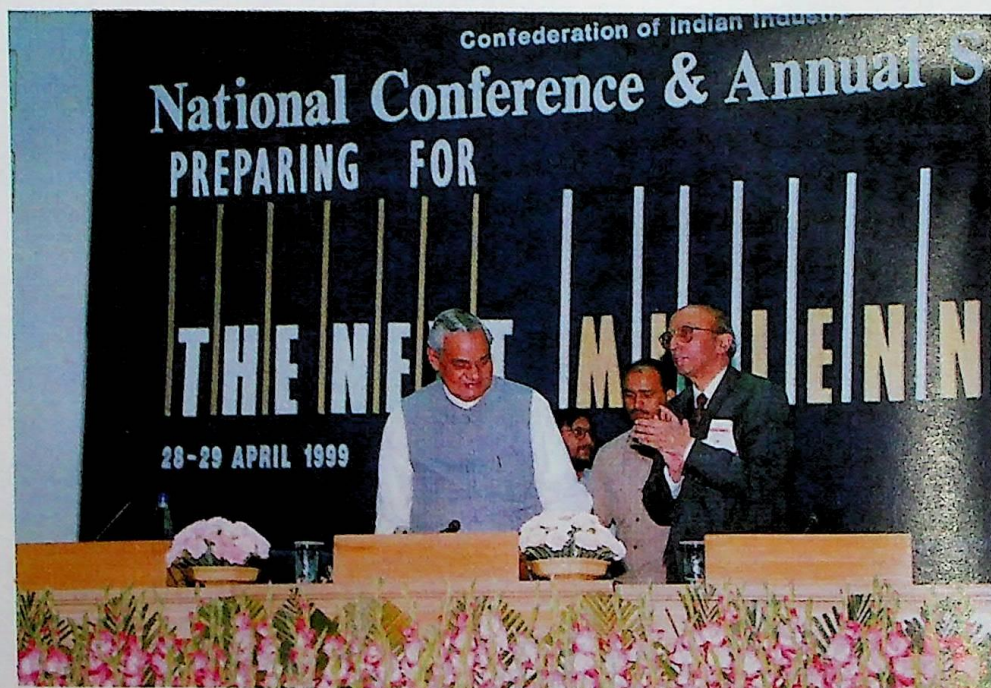
Speech while inaugurating the Annual Session of the Confederation of Indian Industries, New Delhi, 28 April 1999

The country has journeyed through a period of avoidable and unnecessary turmoil in the past few weeks. Irresponsible and unprincipled politics has played tricks with the people's mandate. The cynical game of numbers has scored over the basic norms of democracy.

In my four decades of parliamentary life, I have never transgressed the tenets of democratic conduct while in the opposition. I would not have minded if those who wanted our government to go, were able to put together a stable, viable alternative.

Alas! The country could not get any kind of alternative government. In the end, the Twelfth Lok Sabha has been dissolved and the country has been pushed into a third general election in three years.

The worst victim of this power game has been the economy and India's image abroad. The loss suffered by the country is



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee arriving to inaugurate the Annual Session of the Confederation of Indian Industry, New Delhi, 28 April 1999

both immeasurable and intangible.

Perhaps the costliest loss is the loss of time, since time is the most precious of all resources.

How will this loss be made up?

Can a developing country like India, whose economy needs to grow rapidly, and which has all the potential to grow fast enough to meet the growing needs of our people, afford to suffer this loss year after year?

Bad politics is the worst enemy of the economy and business. Similarly, the best friend of the economy and business is good governance. For good governance we need stability. The coming elections, whenever they are held, are thus an opportunity for our people to give a full mandate to those wedded to faster economic growth and a firm and fair administration.

Friends, it is not for me to give a scorecard of what our Government has done in the past thirteen months before the game was interrupted—or, shall I say, disrupted?

We did make mistakes when we began our innings in March last year. We faced many difficult overs. There was much distraction, but we kept doing our duty with dedication and determination, learning from our mistakes as we went along.

Our Government took many decisions on a variety of fronts and unveiled several new policies to strengthen the economy. We gave a new impetus to agriculture, infrastructure, financial sector, foreign investment, exports, telecommunications, information technology, and other sectors.

In the backdrop of an unprecedented financial and political crisis in Southeast Asia and several other parts of the world, the Indian economy stood firm and even achieved steady recovery.

Some countries imposed economic sanctions in the wake of our bold step to exercise the nuclear option. Attempts were

made to isolate and browbeat us. But these attempts failed. We held our heads high and faced the situation with courage.

If Pokhran strengthened our national security, the bus journey to Pakistan was a sincere attempt to bring in a new era of peace and cooperation in South Asia.

The Free Trade agreement with Sri Lanka, renewal of the transit treaty with Nepal, and improvement in our bilateral relations with Bangladesh were also part of the same endeavour.

In policymaking, as also in the management of the economy, we adopted an approach of active partnership between the government and business.

The Task Forces we constituted on different subjects enabled us to have the benefit of the knowledge and experience of the private sector.

We followed this consultative process out of conviction, not expediency. Unlike others, we do not carry the ideological baggage of antipathy for the private sector.

The results began showing, especially after the budget of 1999. For the first time after many years, budget-making was rid of any lobbying and counter lobbying by interested parties, establishing our belief in the principle that transparency must be the hallmark of economic management.

The "feel good" factor was back in the business and investor community. It was also impressively mirrored by the upswing in the capital market. I compliment all those companies, which have done well in a tough year.

Unfortunately, some of this gain has been rudely halted by the recent political turbulence. But, friends, I assure you that this is a temporary—although entirely avoidable—phase.

We will return to accomplish our unfinished economic agenda. The fundamentals of the Indian economy are strong. I have faith in the maturity of the electorate to give a full mandate to that alliance of parties, which has demonstrated its

faith in reforms—not through words alone but through decisive action.

Let me assure you that, even as a “caretaker” Government, it will be my unflinching endeavour to take care of the needs of the economy. We shall not allow the normal affairs of governance to slacken.

Friends, let us not, however, get too obsessed with the current intermission. India must not lose sight of her destiny, and the duties that must be performed by all of us to realize this destiny.

I have a vision for India as a land of limitless opportunity and achievement for every citizen. It is a vision, which, I am sure, is shared by all those in this audience.

We cannot tolerate that this great country, which is blessed with enviable natural, human, and civilizational resources, enters the 21st century in the shape in which it is today. We must free India from the curse of mass poverty, mass unemployment, and mass illiteracy.

The India of Tomorrow will be a land where a billion people live a life of material comfort, social peace, and cultural resurgence.

As I emphasized in my address to the CII annual session last year, the key to the realization of all these noble ideals lies in one simple patriotic mantra: growth, more growth, still more growth. Nothing less will do for India.

This mantra has been the guide to my government yesterday and today. It will be so tomorrow, too.

We will push ahead with our agenda of accelerated internal liberalization and calibrated globalization.

In the now dissolved Lok Sabha, we had promised to present a document on the second generation of reforms. We shall soon do so, with the hope of generating a fruitful nationwide debate. I appeal to business organizations like the

CII to enrich this debate with their constructive ideas and suggestions.

The unfinished agenda of reforms will have five thrust areas. Firstly, they will focus on the elimination of red tape, so as to make life easier for trade and industry.

We will put an end to unnecessary bureaucratic control and unjustified governmental interference. Timely implementation, and not just good policymaking, will receive our highest priority.

Secondly, we shall concentrate on taking the benefits of reforms rapidly to those vital sectors of the economy, which have so far been largely neglected.

I have in mind agriculture, agri-processing industries, small-scale industries, and the huge unorganized sector. These have the highest potential to create productive employment, and hence to rapidly enlarge the market for consumer and other goods.

Thirdly, we will take further major steps to continue our policy of encouraging foreign investments. Transparency, stability, and continuity will be the cornerstones of this policy. We will also fashion an appropriate strategy in relation to all the WTO related issues, which will secure our national interests while simultaneously enabling India to gain her rightful share in global exports.

Fourthly, economic reforms will not yield the desired results unless Indian business fulfils its social obligations to the fullest.

It is not enough that politics in India should be value based. It is equally important that business too should be based on certain basic values and principles that are rooted in Indian culture and are essential for good business in the long run.

Without this, neither politicians nor businessmen can regain

the credibility that they have lost in the eyes of the common people. In this context, I congratulate the CII for formulating a code for good corporate governance. I would like all Indian companies to sincerely implement this code.

Lastly, tackling the many entrenched problems in education will be an integral part of our economic policy. The future of any nation aspiring to achieve prosperity on a sustainable basis depends on the development of knowledge-based industries.

Unless we improve the standards of education at all levels, beginning with primary education, we will deprive India of the great opportunities that the new millennium holds.

In the past thirteen months, we took some important steps to promote information technology. I am happy that the central initiative in this regard has been quickly emulated by many state governments.

Friends, India is on the move. No longer will our people tolerate a movement marked by one step forward, two steps back. Our youth, especially, are hungry for progress, which is their legitimate due.

To help achieve it is the common duty of the government and the business community.

Today, I reiterate my commitment to continue this duty—with the same sincerity that my government showed in the past thirteen months.

Culture of Cooperation Should Continue to Grow

I AM HAPPY to participate in today's function to honour the best-performing cooperative banks in India. I heartily congratulate the award-winning banks. The competence and hard work of the employees and managements of these banks deserve to be applauded by one and all.

My special compliments to the Punjab State Cooperative Bank and the Punjab Land Development Bank for winning the top honours for the second consecutive year.

We are all meeting in a very special circumstance. The back pages of the daily newspapers are all about the World Cup starting next week and the front pages are all about the so-called "India Cup" in September and October. All eyes are on who will perform how. In times like these, we often tend to forget and applaud the real performers and achievers in our society.

For example, our kisans have produced a record output of more than 200 million tonnes of foodgrains last year. This achievement could not have been possible without the contribution of many agricultural and other rural cooperatives.

Some of the most significant success stories in contemporary India are, indeed, being scripted in the cooperative sector. Unfortunately, they go largely unrecognized and unhonoured at the national level. Many of these accomplishments are in the cooperative banking sector. Their success is particularly laudable, since it is not very easy for cooperative banks to

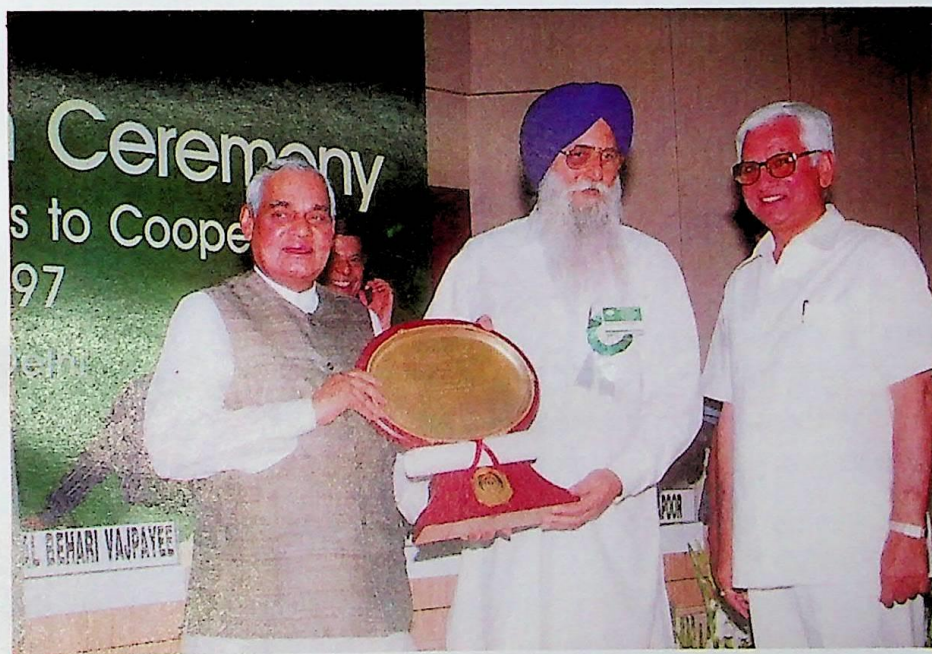
Speech while honouring the best performing Cooperative Bank, New Delhi,
7 May 1999

perform well in the face of the debilitating policy framework that restricted their growth for several decades.

At the outset, therefore, I wish to commend the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) for instituting these awards and thereby recognizing excellence in cooperative banking in India.

As I join you in praising this triumph of the cooperative spirit in our economy, especially the rural economy, I have a simple message to the nation: *Sarkaren aayengi aur jaayengi, lekin sahar ki sanskruti nirantar vikasit hoti rahani chahiye.* (Governments will come and governments will go. But the culture of cooperation should continue to grow forever.) I say so, because the spirit of cooperation alone imparts long-term sustenance to any society.

Mahatma Gandhi, who is the greatest source of inspiration for the cooperative movement in modern times, explained this



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee honouring the best performing Cooperative Bank, New Delhi, 7 May 1999

philosophy tellingly.

He said, "Drops of water make the ocean, the reason being that there is complete cohesion and cooperation among the drops. The same is true of human beings organized in cooperative institutions."

Cooperatives, regional rural banks, and apex institutions such as NABARD and NCDC are the most appropriate agents for the socio-economic development of farmers, the rural poor and many sections of the unorganized sector in India.

They have proved their usefulness in the past. They will continue to be indispensable in the future too. The figures speak loudly about their pivotal place in our national economy.

India has more than 450,000 cooperatives in agricultural credit, marketing, agri-processing, sugar, dairy, and industries such as fertilizers, handloom, handicrafts, and housing.

Their share capital exceeds Rs. 10,000 crore. Almost every village in the country is covered in the cooperative network, which has a combined membership of nearly 200 million. Nearly 65 percent of rural households are members of cooperatives.

How can we neglect a sector that is as vast as this and is so central to our goal of poverty eradication?

Yet, neglect of cooperative institutions is a stark reality. Most of them are facing severe problems, which restrict their ability to function viably and effectively. They fall far short of meeting the credit, marketing, and other requirements of crores of people involved in farm and non-farm economic activities.

Over the years, our rural credit cooperatives have depended more on external support, rather than on mobilization of internal resources. This runs against the very philosophy of swavalamban or self-reliance.

No institution or sector can sustain itself forever on infusion of external resources. Barring some States, the recovery

performance of primary agricultural credit societies is quite poor. Non-performing assets are also high, although I must hasten to add that they are not as high as in the industrial sector.

It is not for me to list the problems facing cooperative financial institutions, since people in this audience know them better than anyone else. What is important is to focus our attention on solving these problems.

What is important is to extend the reforms process to the cooperative sector. My Government is fully committed to implementing cooperative reforms, as part of our resolve to move ahead with the second generation of economic reforms.

Cooperative reforms, however, are not only economic in nature. They call for firm and far-reaching political, administrative, and economic initiatives. Firstly, we must end the unhealthy influence of politics that has retarded the healthy growth of cooperative financial institutions. Politicization of cooperatives for furthering personal and partisan ends has destroyed the spirit of cooperation in these institutions.

When competitive and confrontational politics spills over into the cooperative sector, it inevitably leads to the lack of active participation by a majority of members, unprofessional and inefficient functioning of the institutions, mounting dues, willful default, and growing sickness.

It is distressing to note that some cooperative credit institutions have eaten not only into their capital but also into their deposits.

Political contests have their place in a democracy, but not in the economy. I appeal to all the political parties to learn from the sobering experience of the past decades, and cooperate in de-politicizing and democratizing the cooperative sector.

Secondly, the time has come to vastly reduce the interference of the government in the functioning of cooperatives. Stifling bureaucratic control has severely affected

the viability and sustainability of cooperatives.

Very often, Central and State Governments treat them as para-statal bodies and virtual extensions of the Government. Consequently, members feel little sense of ownership and their elected representatives are left with little room for flexibility and innovation.

I wonder how liberalization is good for the corporate sector, but not so for the cooperative sector.

Thirdly, we must reduce the distance between the supplier and recipient of credit in rural cooperatives. Here I refer not only to the physical distance but also the institutional distance. For example, why should there be so many layers of lending institutions between NABARD and the end beneficiary—namely, the farmer?

I am told that many farm loans, which NABARD disburses at a rate of interest of 6.5 per cent, finally are delivered to farmers at 12 to 13 per cent. This huge difference is presumably for meeting the "costs", "risks", and "margins" of intermediate cooperatives at the state, district, and local levels.

However, who loses in the process? Are cooperatives meant to help the farmers, or help their own structures?

I urge NABARD and all other associated institutions to quickly examine how this anomaly can be rectified and how farmers can get the much-needed loans at reduced interest rates.

In particular, if primary cooperatives of proven track record are willing to lend to farmers at the same interest rate at which NABARD disburses the loans, the farmers should be allowed to avail this facility.

I am happy to know, in this context, that the question of de-layering is being considered seriously in banking circles.

Friends, the present weak state of cooperative institutions is largely due to the faulty policy framework that has shackled them so far.

Now the time has come to introduce comprehensive changes in the cooperative laws, to bring them in line with the rapid changes in the national and global economy.

Towards this end, we will remove the dual control of authority over cooperative banks, which, presently, are governed under both the Banking Regulation Act and the State Cooperative Societies Act. In order to induce professionalism in their operations, there is a need to bring them more under the provisions of the Banking Regulation Act.

We will also drastically curtail the baneful practice of supersession of cooperative institutions. We will entrust them to democratically elected boards.

All restrictive provisions in the existing laws will be removed and the powers of management of cooperatives will be transferred to the members.

In order to bring uniformity in the functioning of credit cooperatives all over the country, a model bill has been suggested to all State Governments, in which the Registrar of Cooperative Societies will have a facilitatory role; no longer will he have the powers of interference.

Friends, throughout my public life I have championed such policies that promote the interests of *gram*, *gareeb*, and *kisan*.

As you all very well know, the Union Budget for 1999-2000 that was presented by finance minister Shri Yashwant Sinha has a very strong pro-village, pro-poor, and pro-farmer focus.

With the budget having been adopted unanimously by the now-dissolved Lok Sabha, my Government has taken necessary steps to ensure speedy implementation of all the welfare and developmental programmes already announced by us.

The budget has made an enhanced provision of Rs. 3,500 crore for the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF).

For the first time, it has also widened the scope of the Fund to allow lending to gram panchayats, self-help groups, and eligible NGOs for implementing village-level infrastructure projects such as roads, drinking water schemes, primary education centres, rural health centres, etc.

I am happy to announce that the guidelines for the implementation of the revamped RIDF will be finalized by May end and actual implementation will begin from June 15.

Our farmers suffer huge losses each year due to weak post-harvest storage and marketing facilities for foodgrains, vegetables and fruits. The budget has stated our resolve to create additional cold storage capacity of 1.2 million tonnes and modernize 800,000 tonnes of existing units over the next few years. We have also decided to create 450,000 tonnes of onion storage capacity.

The Ministry of Agriculture, with the help of NABARD, has finalized the guidelines of this scheme. Disbursal of loans for its implementation will start before June 15.

Conservation and efficient management of water is critical for raising the productivity of Indian agriculture. Towards this end, the government is preparing the blueprint for the launch of a National Movement for Watershed Development.

As the first important step in this direction, implementation of micro-level watershed projects through the active involvement of gram panchayats, local self-help groups, and NGOs will begin from June 1.

NABARD will establish a National Watershed Development Fund of Rs. 100 crore, which will soon be further enhanced. Organizations belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes will have a priority in availing assistance under this Fund.

The concept of self-help groups is of immense importance in the realization of our goal to take banking services to the doorsteps of the poor. They are especially useful for freeing the

poor people from the clutches of moneylenders.

I warmly compliment NABARD for its over-performance in reaching the targets set for it. Last year, against a target of 10,000 self-help groups, it covered 18,000. In the current year, too, I am confident that it will surpass the enhanced target of covering 50,000 micro-credit groups at the grassroots level.

I wish NABARD all the best in realizing its internal target of one million self-help groups in the next ten years. Experience has shown that a vast network of vibrant grassroots cooperative organizations is the surest guarantor of socio-economic empowerment of the poor—and especially of poor women.

I am happy to know that NABARD has established a Cooperative Development Fund of Rs. 50 crore for assisting rural cooperatives to induct information technology. This drive needs to be intensified in order to improve efficiency and productivity in the rural economy.

You may consider enlarging this fund for financing IT in cooperative institutions, so that Village India begins to benefit from its interaction with the Global Village.

Friends, all of us are committed to the goal of building a strong and prosperous India.

However, a strong and prosperous India is inconceivable without a strong and prosperous rural India. Revitalization of cooperative institutions is central to the success of this agenda.

Come, let us work together with a sense of cooperation for the realization of this vision and this mission.

A Small Place with Big Achievements

I AM PLEASED to be present amongst the people of Pondicherry today. It is an especially happy day for me. A part of the reason for my happiness, is of course, the event for which we all have gathered here today. I am pleased to inaugurate 35.5 megawatt gas-based power plant and to lay the foundation stones for a Centre for Advanced Studies in Information Technology and a Software Technology Park. Together, the three projects will further brighten the place that Pondicherry occupies on the developmental map of India. They will contribute significantly to the prosperity, profile, and prestige of Pondicherry as a small place with big accomplishments. I compliment the Government of Pondicherry for these initiatives and hope that these three projects will be completed within the scheduled time.

I have, however, a special reason to be gratified today. Pondicherry has been the karma bhoomi and tapo bhoomi of one of the greatest seers of modern India: Maharshi Aurobindo. This land has been made sacred by the thoughts and insights that he developed, along with Mother, for the reawakening of India and the entire humanity on the lines of peace, unity, and all-round development. Therefore, I come to Pondicherry to pay my tributes to Maharshi Aurobindo and to Mother and to seek inspiration and strengthen from them in my own humble work. Through deep meditation and study, Aurobindo concluded that India has a crucial role to play in reshaping the destiny of mankind. He said:

"India must be reborn, because her rebirth is demanded by the future of the world. India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions

Speech while inaugurating a power plant at Karaikal, Pondicherry, 25 May 1999

of mankind, it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is she who must harmonize all religion, science, and philosophy and make mankind one soul”.

I must emphasize here that Aurobindo's call for the unity of mankind did not postulate creation of uniformity of all religions and cultures—either in India or in the world. For he wrote:

“The Mohammedan, the Hindu, the Buddhist, and the Christian in India will not have to cease to be Mohammedan, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian, in any sense of the term, for uniting into one great and resurgent Indian Nation. Devotion to one's own ideals and institutions with toleration and respect for the ideals and institutions of other sections of the community and an ardent love and affection for the common civic life and ideal of all—these are what must be cultivated by us now, for the building of the real Indian Nation. To try to build it in any other way will be impossible.”

This ideal of Indian secularism—*Sarva Panth Samabhaav* or Equal Respect for All Faiths—is the ideal to which our government is committed.

Although Aurobindo embodied the highest attainment of Indian spiritualism, he constantly reminded his countrymen not to lag behind in the development of science and technology. He laid great emphasis on India's rapid material progress, so that all our citizens could be well fed, well clothed, well sheltered, and well educated. He dreamt of a strong, self-confident, and prosperous India—and it is a dream that all of us share. He wrote:

“For what is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation.”

This is the ideal that guided our Government during the

thirteen months we were in office before the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. Our vision is to see India become strong in all respects. Following our firm commitment to strengthen India's national security, we have taken certain historic steps in this direction, as illustrated by the nuclear tests in Pokhran and the launching of Agni 2 missile. Our external borders are safer now than any time in the past, notwithstanding certain recent incidents in Kargil that we are determined to counter effectively. Similarly, the internal security situation is also better than at any time in recent decades.

Alongside our plans to strengthen our national security, we have also consciously followed a path of peace and cooperation with all our neighbours. I believe that Shakti and Shanti go together. Only a strong nation can pursue the path of peace. This is the perspective that guided my recent bus journey to Pakistan. Next month I plan to undertake a similar bus journey to Bangladesh.

The free-trade agreement we have signed with the government of Sri Lanka will greatly help our two economies, and especially trade and industry in the southern states including Pondicherry.

Friends, India's strength lies in unity and cooperation among all her diverse communities. It also rests on harmonious centre-state relations. During the past thirteen months, my government has followed the principle of equal and fair treatment towards all the state governments, irrespective of their party affiliations. In the same spirit, we have also tried to settle several long-pending inter-state disputes. Today I compliment the people and the government of Pondicherry as also the people and governments of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala—for their positive cooperation in finding a solution to the Cauvery water dispute. The example of Cauvery shows that there is no dispute that cannot be satisfactorily resolved if all parties adopt a cooperative approach and keep national interests uppermost in their minds.

My government is equally committed to strengthening

our economy, so that India emerges as a strong economic power in the world in the coming years. This is demonstrated by the various steps we have taken to accelerate the pace of development in agriculture, industry, and infrastructure sectors such as power, energy, telecommunications, roads and highways, airports, etc. It is also illustrated by the unprecedented encouragement we have given to the development of information technology, which is ushering in revolutionary changes in all areas of the economy, education, entertainment, and R&D. Our government has taken a number of initiatives to encourage both software and hardware development in India.

Following the lead taken by the central government, various state governments also have unveiled ambitious schemes to promote IT. The combined efforts of the centre and the states have enabled the Indian IT industry—and the software industry in particular—to scale new heights in sales and exports. The most amazing aspect of IT is that its development defies the boundaries of distance and geography. Hence, it is especially heartening for me to see that India's progress in IT is today not confined to a few cities and states. More and more cities and towns are joining this race and also showing rapid progress. Evidence of this is seen in the initiative taken by the government of Pondicherry to establish a Centre for Advanced Studies in Information Technology and also a Software Technology Park.

Pondicherry is ideally suited to become a major centre for IT education and software exports. It has a good educational infrastructure. It has a talented work force. It also has the unique advantage of global exposure. I am told that a number of IT-enabled services have already been established here. These services have a tremendous potential to create high-quality and high-value jobs for educated Indian youth. I am confident, therefore, that Pondicherry will soon find a place on the global IT map.

The power plant at Karaikkal will enable the government of Pondicherry to encourage new industrial and commercial ventures in the region. I would, however, urge the authorities

to take special care to ensure that the industrial and economic growth of Pondicherry keeps it free of pollution and environmental degradation. All of us have an obligation to preserve the serenity and beauty of this Place of Enlightenment for posterity.

With these words, I once again convey my best wishes to the people and government of Pondicherry.

Software: Fastest Growing Component of India's Exports

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to be in your midst today. I join all of you in honouring the best-performing entrepreneurs for their contribution to the exports of electronic goods and computer software during 1996-97 and 1997-98. Indeed, all of you in the Electronics and Computer Software sector deserve to be honoured for your excellent performance as an industry. Although exports by your industry are the newest addition to India's basket of exports, it is probably also the fastest growing.

India's share in world trade is currently very low. It is much lower than what would correspond to our size and potential. To be a global player, it is imperative that we increase our share in the world trade substantially in the next few years. To achieve this goal, an expanding share of our exports will have to come from the exports of software, hardware, electronic goods, and IT-enabled services.

The contribution of electronics and software industry to the national drive to boost exports has been steadily rising. Not only is your growth rate impressive but equally important, you have

Speech while giving away Electronics and Computer Software Exports Awards, New Delhi, 29 May 1999

sustained this steep upward curve over the last ten years. I warmly compliment the Electronics and Computer Software Export Promotion Council (ESC) for its sterling role in this success. It is among the younger export promotion councils, starting its operations only a decade back. Nevertheless, it has outperformed all the other Export Promotion councils.

Friends, all of us share the dream of making India a strong, prosperous, and self-confident nation, which regains her rightful place in the world community. But the strength of a nation is determined chiefly by the strength of its economy. Economic security is, indeed, the bedrock of national security. India should be prepared to face any challenges—now and in the future. In this national mission, our kisans, workers, entrepreneurs, scientists, and IT professionals have to work with the same determination to succeed as our jawans and officers.

I am, therefore, especially happy to note that our software entrepreneurs are adding significantly to India's economic



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee giving away Electronics and Computer Software Exports Awards, New Delhi, 29 May 1999

strength with their shining performance. Every additional dollar that you earn in exports beefs up our economic security,

In recent years, the Indian software industry has shown a very high degree of dynamism. Some of the well-known software companies have achieved such spectacular success in a short time that they have even overtaken many traditional players in industry. They, as also the many NRI professionals in the IT sector, have brought new prestige to India in the arena of international business. This has made even ordinary Indians confident of our own capability to compete with the best in the world. I applaud their success today and urge all of them to set even more ambitious growth targets in the future. Your Council has made an important contribution to this success. By playing the role of a facilitator, the Council has ensured effective implementation of the policy and procedural measures announced by the Government from time to time. Truly, your Council has set an example for other Export Promotion Councils to emulate.

The importance attached by our government to the promotion of information technology was fully reflected in the National Agenda for Governance, which aimed at making India a Software Superpower. We did so out of our conviction that IT is, indeed, India's Tomorrow. One of the first initiatives of the government was to constitute a National Task Force on Information Technology. The spirit of government-industry partnership was evident in the very composition of the task force, as also in the widest possible consultations the task force held in different parts of the country. The task force inspired many state governments to formulate their own IT policies and to set up state-level task forces for their implementation. As you know, the Action Plan for software exports prepared by the IT Task Force has been adopted by the government and its recommendations are being implemented. The report has set an ambitious target of achieving software exports of US \$ 50 billion by the year 2008. I have no doubt that, given the inherent energy of India's software industry, this record is fully realizable. Your track record fully confirms my optimism.

The most exciting aspect of the IT industry is that it is

primarily knowledge-based. The initial capital investment for a software company is modest. As a result, a large number of young and talented entrepreneurs have entered the software sector with their start-up companies. Most of them are first-generation entrepreneurs, coming from middle-class families and often also small and medium towns. It shows how IT is effecting a revolutionary expansion in the spirit of enterprise in Indian society. This is a healthy development and needs to be encouraged.

Friends, although India's performance in software development and exports makes all of us proud, we cannot be blind to our failure so far as to give a similar impetus to our electronics and IT hardware sector. This imbalance must end.

As India's economy grows rapidly, and as more and more sectors of industry, trade and services increase the induction of IT into their operations, the demand for IT hardware is bound to grow. This demand cannot be met solely, or even chiefly, by imports. We must expand and strengthen our indigenous production base, both to meet domestic demand as also to capture our share of the rapidly expanding global market. In short, we must aim at making India a centre for world-class design, manufacture, and export of IT hardware. This was, indeed, the objective with which the IT Task Force prepared its second report as an Action Plan for hardware exports. This has been examined and approved by a ministerial committee. The third and final report, which focuses primarily on IT education, manpower development, and R&D, is also presently under the consideration of the government. I assure you that the government will adopt these two reports very soon, leading to their speedy implementation. The government will also take necessary steps to promote electronic commerce, which will revolutionize the Indian economy in the coming years. I compliment the Department of Electronics for formulating the draft cyber laws to facilitate e-commerce in the country.

Friends, the success of the Indian software industry in the international arena is now an established reality. While we have reasons to be happy at the performance, some introspection is

certainly called for. I am told that, at present, there is a worrying dichotomy in the composition of our software exports, with much of exports occupying the low end of the value chain. The share of high-value software packages in the total export of computer software from India is rather low. Of course, some Indian companies have been making good software packages but their number is, as yet small.

A large number of small and medium enterprises are technically capable of making software packages suitable for export. However, they have been handicapped because of the inadequacy of venture capital, working capital, and lack of aggressive marketing capabilities. With a view to boosting export of computer software, particularly software packages, the Government has created a Rs. 100 crore venture capital fund. I would like the utilization of this fund to become speedy and free of routine bureaucratic hurdles.

The development of the IT sector is critically dependent on the quality, accessibility and affordability of the telecommunications infrastructure. The Government has recently announced a New Telecom Policy with a view to providing world-class telecom services in India and also to reap the benefits of the convergence phenomenon. We have also unveiled a liberal ISP Policy in order to achieve rapid proliferation of the Internet with the active participation of the private sector. One of the areas that will be immediately benefited by these policy initiatives is IT-enabled services. India has a tremendous potential for both exports and employment generation in this area. I compliment the department of electronics and industry associations like NASSCOM for their concerted efforts to promote IT-enabled services in India.

On the occasion of today's awards presentation ceremony, I congratulate all the award winners and urge all others to strive for still higher achievements in the years to come.

Speed up Development: Make it Multifaceted

TODAY IS A day of pride not only for Uttar Pradesh, but also for the entire country, that in Pata town of Auriya district, a world-class petrochemical complex has started functioning. I am very pleased to dedicate this complex to the Nation. It is the fruit of labour of the people of India that such industrial units are being set up in backward areas, which will help in the progress of the country.

I am very happy to come to Pata to visit the Uttar Pradesh Petrochemical Complex of the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL). I am told that this petrochemical complex is the first not only in Uttar Pradesh, but also in Northern India. UPCC is among the most advanced petrochemical complexes built with the latest technology. It has cost Rs. 2,500 crore, and it can be expanded as well.

First of all, I would like to thank the petroleum ministry, the Uttar Pradesh government, and the Gas Authority of India for having established this enterprise in this industrially backward part of the State. We would like balanced development throughout India so that there is no geographical or social inequality. Uttar Pradesh's population is the highest in India. It is more than that of most countries. If Uttar Pradesh does not develop, then the whole country will suffer. My government is duty-bound to ensure the development of not just Uttar Pradesh, but also all the States of North India. The commissioning of GAIL's complex is an important milestone in this endeavour.

In our thirteen-month government, we have done a lot for infrastructure development. We focused on telecommunications, electricity, national highways, new rail lines, and many other areas. There were many different actions, but the aim

Speech while dedicating to the nation the Petro-Chemical Complex, Pata,
10 June 1999

was one—to speed up India's economic development and make it multifaceted so that there are more jobs and poverty is banished. The Uttar Pradesh Petrochemical Complex is a step in achieving the same aim.

Today in India, as in the rest of the world, the demand for plastics and plastics-based products is increasing. We have to import from abroad to fulfil this demand. I am confident that like this complex, other complexes too will be established to satisfy this demand locally. I would like to say that this complex of GAIL should be expanded quickly.

Petrochemical complexes of the size of UPCC are continuous steps on the road to economic progress. They provide many benefits to the people, the State, and the whole country. We need big units like these in basic services, energy, and other economic areas, so that there is consolidated progress, direct and indirect employment generation, improvement in the lives of the people, and our dream of making India an economically powerful country in the 21st century is realized.

There are enough investment opportunities in the country. To facilitate this, my Government has taken courageous steps to improve the supportive policy and the institutional framework. After this year's budget, share prices have risen, and compared to last year, foreign investment has increased.

In agriculture, there has been good work, and the expected output of 200 million tonnes will be a record. We have brought our economy to the take-off stage and I am confident that agriculture, industry, and the different services will contribute to further development in a big way.

The fruits of economic progress must be with the people; therefore we must give more importance to social factors. I am pleased to know that GAIL has started a lot of schemes for social development in this area. Those displaced persons who had made their land available to this project have been resettled. They have got electricity, drinking water, new roads, primary health centres, and primary, adult, and vocational education. I hope that GAIL will continue this good work by doing more for social development.

Not only will this petrochemical complex become an inspiration for other industries, it will be an important source of revenue to the State. I hope that industrialists will make the most use of this complex by setting up small and medium units to make products based on plastic. I know that, with the setting up of other ancillary units, the face of this place will change in a few years.

It is heartening to know that gas produced off Mumbai's coast is being used here and that Uttar Pradesh is availing of its adequate share. This complex is the next step in using this gas to make value-added products.

World over, the process of industrialization is not that easy. The environment-related problems that this is bringing with it are exercising all of us. All of us agree that we have to maintain this earth for the forthcoming generations for which we need to take individual and collective steps. I am sure that concern for the environment will become an integral part of our industrial culture.

I remember that, a few years ago, there was a lot of concern about pollution harming the Taj Mahal. The Petroleum Ministry has taken some commendable steps to control the pollution in and around the Taj Mahal. Very soon, the industries in Agra and Firozabad, especially the iron and glass works will be using gas. This will help us to restore the pride of the splendid Taj Mahal. I commend the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry and GAIL for coming up with many schemes to replace pollution-spreading fuels by gas, which is more environmentally friendly.

The UPCC would not have become a reality without the dedicated hard work of a lot of people. I congratulate all the employees of GAIL and all other associated with the building of this complex. I also commend the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, the state government, and the management of GAIL who have done a lot to build this.

Today, I am very happy to inaugurate the Uttar Pradesh Petrochemical complex and dedicate it to the Nation.

Agricultural Insurance: A Boon to Rural Farmers

WITH A SENSE of deep satisfaction I am pleased to dedicate the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme to the farmers of the country.

There is a special reason for this feeling. We are fulfilling the firm commitment that our Government has towards farmers.

Last year, on Independence Day, I had promised to extend the coverage of the then Agricultural Insurance Scheme and to make it more comprehensive so that new areas and other crops could be brought under its ambit.

With this new scheme, we are not only taking our agriculture sector nearer to modernization, but are also bringing it closer to the country's banking and insurance sectors. We will now be able to tell our farmers that their risks will not be confined to them, but will also be shared by the Government.

All of us are aware that, world-over, agriculture is considered a risky area. In our country such possibilities are more pronounced. Most of our crops are dependent on rains, as adequate irrigation facilities are not available. In our country rainy season lasts for about three months and water is available to the fields only for these three months. Rest of the time the fields go without water.

Not only this, our farmer lives in such circumstances where loans, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides are not available to him in adequate quantity. We have failed to make necessary arrangements in these fifty years. Farmers have to face market forces. These being unfavourable, he is sometimes forced to sell his produce at an un-remunerative price.

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi while dedicating National Agricultural Insurance Scheme to farmers, New Delhi, 22 June 1999

Comprehensive insurance will lend some stability to the farmer's life. He will be able to face risks more easily. He will be able to invest more in his land and adopt new technology. Banks and other financial institutions will also be benefitted, as they will be able to recover their dues in time.

We have crossed 200 million tonnes mark in agricultural production, which is a record. Production of wheat is more than 70 million tonnes, which is again a record. We have more than 14 million tonnes wheat in our godowns and now we have reached a stage where we are faced with the problem of storage.

India has not only attained self-sufficiency in foodgrains, but has emerged as world's biggest producer of fruits, tea and jute. We are number three in producing paddy, sugarcane, vegetables and ground nut. Our milk production ranks second in the world. Credit for all these achievements goes to our farmers. The slogan of "Jai Kisan" given by Shastriji has come true.

But along with these achievements, our farmers have to face a number of difficulties. I have already referred to a few of these problems. Last year, we were witness to suicides by farmers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and to an extent Punjab. All such happenings prove that unless comprehensive Insurance Corporation comes into existence, farmers will be forced to take such extreme steps.

I and my colleagues in the Government have resolved to introduce a scheme for the benefit of farmers, which will provide coverage to a maximum number of them.

Today, we are dedicating the National Agriculture Insurance Scheme to the Nation. The scheme will be implemented from the *Rabi* season of 1999-2000. Besides foodgrains and oilseed growers the scheme will also cater to the needs of growers of commercial crops and horticulturists. To me, the most satisfying feature of the scheme is that within five years, it will attain self-dependence automatically.

While formulating this scheme, those parts of the country, where a lot of agricultural development has taken place as well as those which still lag behind have been taken into consideration.

General Insurance Corporation (GIC) will manage and implement the scheme till we set up a new agency, National Agriculture Insurance Corporation. I hope GIC will implement it efficiently, so that rural people are made aware of the importance of insurance and its benefits.

When we talk of social security or safety net in a progressive society, insurance is considered as its integral constituent. Government alone will not be able to make extensive provisions for Old Age Pension or other such schemes, but the Government and the society will both have to come together pool their resources and then face the risks and unforeseen circumstances.

The National Agriculture Insurance Scheme is an important step towards country's economic development efforts, which will result in wide benefits, particularly to farmers and generally to rural India. I would like to assure farmers that Government will not allow any hinderance in implementation of this scheme. We will simplify its process.

I appeal to all the employees of Government and General Insurance Corporation to extend their whole-hearted cooperation in taking this scheme to every corner of the country and in extending its benefits to more and more farmers. Let us together start a golden chapter in the history of the country's agriculture.

Monitor Properly End-use of Developmental Funds

I AM INDEED pleased to be here this afternoon with all of you at the concluding celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. Last year, I had the pleasure of participating in the inaugural ceremony on this very day. I am sure all the members and students of your Institute celebrated the Golden Jubilee Year in a befitting way, looking back in satisfaction and looking ahead with confidence.

I am happy to learn that your Institute has had many achievements to its credit during the past year. The new international associations forged by you have raised the prestige of Indian chartered accountants. This is a symbol of the growing recognition of the Indian accountancy profession all over the world. I am glad that the ICAI has taken upon itself this ambassadorial role.

Chartered accountancy is an invaluable, even indispensable, supportive profession for modern business. Development of this profession is indeed the yardstick for evaluating the development of a nation's business and economy. Your Institute has made an important contribution to strengthening professionalism in India business.

Your role has become even more critical in the era of liberalization and globalization. I am happy to note that your Institute has intensified its focus on global best practices in order to raise the profession of accountancy in India to new heights of excellence.

Chartered accountancy in India has not only grown in size but also widened its sectoral and geographical ambit to cover

Speech at the concluding session of the Golden Jubilee of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, New Delhi, 1 July 1999

all parts of the country. It is heartening for me to know that your members, whose number is now close to 100,000, are now operating even in many small towns. This shows the steady growth of our economy, and the proliferation of business away from metros and big cities.

It also shows the conscious and concerted efforts made by your Institute to reach much-needed professional inputs even to small and medium-sized economic units. Your efforts have helped in fostering financial prudence, propriety, and transparency in their operations.

Friends, permit me, however, to point out that there is still one important sector of our economy that has so far not adequately benefited from your professional service. It is the rural and the informal sector. I had referred to this aspect in my address last year, but I think it is necessary to emphasize it once again since the problem is complex and our efforts to meet the challenge have been slow.

All of us are aware that the Government spends vast sums of money every year in various developmental programmes, especially those directed towards rural and agricultural developmental programmes, employment generation, literacy, health, and other social welfare schemes. The end use of these funds needs to be properly monitored and verified.

I firmly believe that our approach to evaluating government spending should be output-based, and not merely input-oriented as is usually the case. It is the end results that matter, and not how much money was spent on what head and how much paper work was completed.

Misuse and wrong use of public funds is a chronic problem affecting the implementation of government schemes. While the Comptroller and Auditor General's office is playing a useful watchdog role, large holes and loopholes still exist through which public money is routinely siphoned off. It not only retards the nation's progress but also defeats our cherished objectives in the social sector, agriculture, and rural development.

The Government would therefore, welcome ICAI's suggestions on ways and means to introduce greater transparency and accountability in governmental financial accounting and reporting systems.

Excellence, independence, and integrity are the hallmarks of any profession. I am glad that the Institute has chosen these as the corner stones of its philosophy and practice. After all, if accountants are honest, it is difficult for others in business to be dishonest. These values, which are the very basis of good professional conduct, should guide all aspects of Indian business.

The educational and technical standards of the Institute have been well recognized worldwide. These should, however, be constantly reviewed to reorient them to meet the requirements of the ever-changing world order. They should not only be comparable with the latest international standards, but must also show to the rest of the world that we are as good as any, in any corner of the world.

I am particularly happy to note that you have made special endeavour to articulate the Accounting and Auditing Standards and improve the standards of corporate reporting in India. Our recent changes in the Company Law have also recognized the importance of adherence to sound accountancy standards. Your Institute has been given a primary role towards reaching this objective.

Initiatives taken by the ICAI for setting up of an Accounting Research Foundation, are indeed welcome. I am sure this would result in the creation of a centre of professional excellence. I have told that the ICAI has also taken concrete steps towards the continuing education of its members and has adopted advanced communication technologies to reach its members across the country.

I compliment the ICAI for setting new trends that other professional institutions and other professions could emulate to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. I may stress that

since business, especially global business, is increasingly being conducted electronically, there should be a greater linkage between accountancy and information technology.

Fortunately, India has an abundance of talent in both the fields, which have been recognized and appreciated all over the world. I sincerely hope that all our professional institutes would make the best use of these opportunities.

I, once again, congratulate all of you on your Golden Jubilee. I extend my best wishes to the Institute in its endeavour to scale greater heights of excellence in the 21st century.

Accelerate Assam's Industrialization

IT IS ALWAYS a great pleasure for me to come back to Assam and renew my ties with the warm and friendly people of this State. I have come to Assam today for a very short visit to attend three very important functions.

The Numaligarh Refinery, which was set up in fulfilment of the commitment of Central Government under Assam Accord has been dedicated to the nation today. It was my proud privilege to be associated with the occasion. This refinery set up at a cost of nearly Rs. 2,500 crore in the upper-Assam district of Golaghat is the most modern and environment-friendly facility in the country. Special attention has been paid to ensure that the establishment of the refinery in no way adversely affects the world-famous Kaziranga sanctuary. It is our belief and hope that, besides providing direct employment, the refinery will lead to investment in downstream petro-

chemical industries. This would give a fillip to the industrialization process of Assam, more employment to the local youth, while generating resources for the State Government. I appeal to the youth to take advantage of this excellent opportunity.

I am also happy to announce that yesterday evening my Government issued notification giving exemption from excise duty for all excisable goods produced in the factories located in the growth centres/IIDC's, etc. in the states of Assam and Tripura. Specified industries located in the areas outside the growth centres/IIDC's, etc. have also been exempted from excise duties in all seven states in the North Eastern region. It has also been decided that while the manufacturers will not be required to pay excise duty on their production, those using such products as inputs will get MODVAT credit. At the same time, the manufacturers are being permitted to avail of MODVAT credit on duty paid on input materials received by them for their finished products. These exemptions will be valid initially for a period of ten years. I would appeal to the State Governments to train their youth in the necessary technical skills for taking advantage of these benefits.

Assam government has a long-standing demand with the government of India to waive repayment liability of the Central loan assistance availed of for flood management in the State. Central government is aware of the financial difficulty faced by the state government in this regard. I am, therefore, happy to announce a moratorium on repayment of Central government loans availed of by the state government so far. This is an interim measure before a final resolution of the issue of outstanding loans, for which a special scheme is under preparation. In the mean time, the first instalment of current year's budgetary outlay has been released in favour of Assam Government.

Central Government is concerned about the floods that

recur in Assam every year in several waves. We have already received reports that the first wave of floods has caused damage to extensive areas. You all may be aware that under the modalities established by the Finance Commission, there is very little flexibility both for the State and Central Government in the matter of financial assistance for meeting natural calamity liabilities. My Government has already taken up with the Eleventh Finance Commission the question of liberalization of these norms. I wish to assure the State Government that we will have no hesitation in releasing Central share of the Calamity Relief Fund in one instalment rather than waiting until the end of the financial year. In addition, pending decision regarding sanction from National Calamity Relief Fund, if short-term accommodation is required by the state government, the same will be sanctioned as Plan Advance.

I am also honoured by the request from the State Government to present the Shrimanta Sankaradeva awards for 1995 and 1996 to Shri Syed Abdul Malik and Prof Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal respectively. Assamese literature is internationally acclaimed and the Assam Sahitya Sabha is an institution with a great literary tradition. The foundation-stone of the new International Convention Centre in the Shrimanta Shankaradeva Kalakhshetra was laid by me today. This is in fulfilment of our commitment for contributing towards socio-cultural development of the region. Completion of this Convention Centre will provide an excellent facility to the people of North East to host international conventions. The entire cost of construction will be borne by the Central Government.

In conclusion, I would like to state that in the current conflict in Kargil our brave soldiers have displayed remarkable courage and patriotism in dealing with enemy forces. The contribution of the people of North Eastern region to the national defence efforts have been substantial. The whole nation has admired the courage and valour displayed by Naga Regiment in Kargil. There are many more youngsters from

North-East serving as Officers and Jawans in other regiments who are also participating in the action. I join the grateful nation in applauding their valour and salute the brave soldiers.

Reach Benefits of Green and White Revolutions to Entire Population

I AM PLEASED to welcome all of you to the 70th Annual General Meeting of the ICAR Society.

Indian agriculture has succeeded in achieving many of the targets set earlier. Just over thirty years ago, India was facing a problem of acute food shortage. We had been forced to import food-grains to meet the scarcity conditions.

Today, India is on the way to becoming a major agricultural power in the world. We have achieved a record food-grain production of 203 million tonnes this year. We are also the largest producer of milk, and are among the top three in vegetables. Rather than importing food, we now have the problem of food preservation and processing, as also improving our port facilities to speed up the transfer of agricultural commodities onto ships for exports.

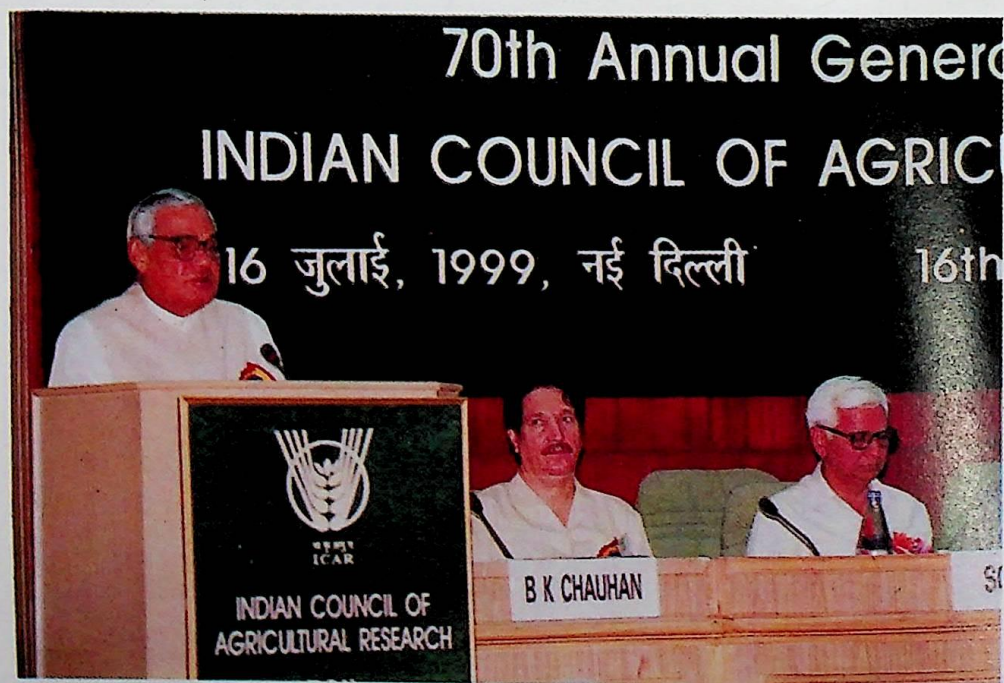
This remarkable achievement was made possible by the combined and dedicated efforts of many different people and institutions. In this, I would like to especially compliment agricultural scientists and the entire Indian agricultural research system led by the ICAR for this feat.

Speech at the 70th Annual General Meeting of ICAR Society, New Delhi,
16 July 1999

It is your hard work, and that of your predecessors, that has helped Indian agriculture, and all those who depend on it for their livelihood, to prosper.

However, no one, especially talented and hardworking people like you, should rest on their laurels. Tomorrow's challenges are as daunting as yesterday's. We surmounted yesterday's challenges. With the same confidence and commitment, we can—and we must—overcome the challenges ahead.

The Ninth Plan has emphasized agricultural growth as the fastest way to remove poverty and generate mass-scale employment, which is our national objective. We have set an ambitious target of 4.5 percent a year for agricultural growth in the Ninth Plan, and 5.3 percent and 5.1 percent in the Tenth and Eleventh Plans. By 2011-12, we should increase our food production by at least one-and-a-half times. Similarly, milk production should be at least tripled.



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee speaking at the 70th Annual General Meeting of ICAR Society, New Delhi, 16 July 1999

This is necessary to reach the benefits of the Green and White Revolutions to our entire population, so as to make India not only hunger-free but also well-fed and healthy.

These are steep targets. Agricultural scientists and researchers have to work hard to achieve them. While production is high, our productivity is not growing rapidly enough. Only if our farms are far more productive than now, can these targets be met.

This is vital because of one obvious constraint that India faces—namely, the constraint of land. We have limited agricultural land, whose total area is likely to shrink to meet the needs of urbanization and industrialization. The only possibility for fresh land is by reclaiming wasteland and saline, alkaline, and waterlogged land. However, such reclaimed land will have poorer fertility than normal agricultural land.

Therefore, the first challenge before agricultural scientists is to develop technology that restores the fertility of reclaimed land.

The second big challenge is one that has been long neglected. We simply have to increase our production of pulses. Its production has gone up but not enough to meet our requirements. We have set ambitious targets in this area—3.5 percent a year in the Ninth Plan, rising to 4.9 percent and 5.7 percent in the Tenth Plan and Eleventh Plan. Even then, the country will have a deficit in pulse production. These target growth rates for pulses are higher than those achieved in the past. They can be achieved by bringing more area under pulses, increasing irrigation coverage, and introducing high-yielding varieties of pulses.

My earnest appeal to all of you is to work extra hard and find ways and means to help achieve increased production of pulses. Only then will the poorest Indians be able to afford nutritious *dal* in their daily diet.

The third challenge as I see it is the challenge of reducing

the total cost of production of different crops, especially cash crops. With the imminent removal of agricultural quotas under the WTO framework, Indian agriculture has a major opportunity to export many commodities where it can have a comparative advantage. This will also put more money into the pockets of our farmers. Developing new breeds that require less fertilizers or pesticides is an urgent need. I am confident that the ICAR and others are up to this task. The environment, too, will benefit from crops that use less chemical inputs.

A related issue is that of biotechnology and the current debate over genetically modified organisms. In collaboration with the Department of Biotechnology, the ICAR and others need to carefully examine this new technology, see whether it's application is advantageous for India, and whether we should not venture forth.

I am happy to know that our agriculture scientists are developing farming systems that take a holistic view of our natural and knowledge resources. Such an approach will help India's kisans do more than producing more crops, which, of course, is very important if we have to achieve our higher targets. It will promote the entire farm sector, including horticulture, sericulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, bee keeping and agri-forestry. This integrated approach helps us in bringing greater prosperity to more number of people in our rural areas.

The efforts of scientists and researchers need to be complimented by Government and industry. As you are aware, our Government unveiled many new schemes in the Union budget of 1999-2000 to improve the infrastructure in our rural areas - such as better roads, granaries, watershed management and cold storages. I am happy to note that some of these schemes are already being implemented.

State Governments are key players in the future of Indian agriculture. They need to better target the subsidies meant for irrigation, power and other farm inputs. This is necessary to improve the viability of our State Electricity Boards. Similarly,

not charging for water gives no disincentive to those farmers who cause waterlogging and other environmental problems. The initiatives by some State Governments to set up and empower Water Users' Associations are a step in the right direction.

Dear scientists, we have just passed through a difficult time at our border. Our jawans have fought valiantly for the country's security. I am sure that the kisans and scientists will also extend their help and cooperation to keep our granaries full and the country's food and nutritional security intact.

I call upon all the members of ICAR Society to work towards our mission of making India Sujalam Suphalam in the very near future.

Work in Unison with Panchayati Raj Institutions and NGOs

I AM HAPPY to be here at the Annual Conference of the Project Directors of the District Rural Development Agencies. This year's meet is significant because, on this occasion, the Ministry has called all the Project Directors from all over the country to be in New Delhi simultaneously, rather than holding the conference in three phases.

India is a vast country. The challenges of rural development differ widely from region to region. Similarly, the experience in overcoming these challenges successfully also varies from state to state—often within a state from district to district. The Project Directors of DRDAs will learn a lot by exchanging their

Address to the Project Directors of the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA), New Delhi, 19 July 1999

ideas and their experiences on a wider scale in a conference of this kind.

The conference also helps policy makers and senior officers in the central government to have a comprehensive feedback from field functionaries like you. You are the critical interface between the people and the policies. You know which programmes work, and which programmes don't—and why. Without this crucial input from the grassroots, it is impossible to conduct useful evaluation or revision of policies and programmes.

What we need, therefore, is frequent interaction between the micro view and the macro view, the view from the bottom and the view from the top, for the most effective implementation of our developmental projects.

This is especially so because, much of the rural development process in India is funnelled through Centrally Sponsored



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee addressing the Project Directors of District Rural Development Agencies, New Delhi, 19 July 1999

Schemes. By their very nature, these programmes are a collaborative effort between the centre and the states. Thus, the success in jointly implementing the various rural development programmes is an important yardstick by which we should judge the efficacy of centre-state cooperation.

Friends, rural India has undergone a remarkable transformation since our country gained independence more than five decades ago. Despite the existence of socio-economic backwardness in many regions, and also in many places within individual states, it is clear to everybody that the complexion of our countryside is changing rapidly.

No doubt, poverty and underdeveloped infrastructure are still the hallmark of much of rural life in India. But this cannot—and should not—blind us to the fact that rural India is also beginning to present a picture of prosperity and progress, though not as fast and widely as we desire.

I emphasize this point specially because, too often, we see a misconception about rural India—as if it is static and perennially poverty-stricken. Such a notion does grave disservice to the tremendous dynamism of our kisans and other sections of our rural society. They have made a significant contribution to India's steady and all-round progress.

The incidence of poverty has declined from 55 percent to 36 per cent in the two decades between 1973-74 and 1993-94. The urban-rural divide, though still very sharp, is narrowing, especially with the expansion of small towns and the emergence of bigger villages into new growth centres. The past few decades have also seen a rapid integration of the rural and agricultural economy into the larger national economy.

The changing face of rural India is, perhaps, best captured by the picture published in some magazines recently of a farmer in western UP driving his harvest-laden tractor with a cellular phone in hand!

This, of course, is not a representative portrait. It cannot

obscure us to the stark poverty that continues to characterize most of rural India. Vast areas of our country are still deprived of the most elementary facilities of development. Even in regions that have registered a relative progress in recent years, a majority of the people are still victims of want and deprivation.

The profile of rural poverty and underdevelopment shows another disturbing feature. Those who are the worst victims of want and deprivation are, largely, people belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes. Not only do they suffer from economic underdevelopment, but also from educational deprivation and social injustice.

The challenges before all of us in rural development are, therefore, three-fold. One, we must devise and implement our policies and programmes in such a way that they help in removing regional imbalances. Two, they should bring the benefits of development to all sections of society, rather than widening the gulf between the rich and the poor. Equally important is the third challenge of social justice and empowerment.

I would strongly urge the officers in New Delhi and in state capitals, as also the project directors of DRDAs at the district level, to fully understand these three challenges and to reorient your work accordingly.

Of particular concern to all of us should be the challenge of empowering women, who are invariably neglected or sidelined—both within their families and communities, and also by the administration. This must end. We have seen how women have achieved excellent results wherever they have exercised their right to participate actively in the implementation of schemes—and, more so, when they are given an opportunity to formulate the programmes that concern them.

Our government's commitment to the all-round development of the Gaon, Gareeb, and Kisan is fully reflected

in the budget for 1999-2000. We have substantially increased the allocation for agriculture and rural development. Equally important, we have also begun the process of streamlining the implementation of the various schemes and programmes. That is why, this year, the plethora of self-employment schemes were merged into one single scheme called the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana.

We have adopted a similar integrative and result-oriented approach in the formulation of the Jawahar Gram Samruddhi Yojana, which gives priority to the creation of rural infrastructure. We have also modified the rural water supply programme and the housing programme with a view to achieving better results.

What is common to all these restructured programmes is the greater thrust on the active participation of the community and the individual. Our past mistake has been to think that poverty can be removed simply by spending more money. This meant more schemes, even though they were difficult to administer and very user-unfriendly. We did not pay adequate attention to people's participation and to democratically supervised delivery mechanisms.

Learning from this past mistake, our government has made a new beginning. As Mahatma Gandhi used to say, The Tree of Democracy is only as strong and healthy as its grassroots—namely, the Panchayati Raj institutions. For the first time, the panchayat and the gram sabha have been both identified and empowered to manage various developmental schemes. The gram sabha is the foundation on which the three-tiered panchayati raj system rests and from which they derive their strength and legitimacy. It is against this background that 1999-2000 has been declared the Year of Gram Sabha.

Dear Project Directors, the process of strengthening the panchayati raj institutions has placed new responsibilities on you. Gone are the days when Government officers could devise

and implement programmes at the district and sub-district levels almost all by themselves, with little participation by people's elected representatives. Such a bureaucratic approach has not produced the desired results.

All of you know that the people's expectations from the government and the administration are growing. No longer are they satisfied with promises. They want performance. They want results. They expect both the bureaucracy and their elected representatives to be sensitive to their needs and responsive to their problems. They demand transparency and accountability from the government.

In a democracy, people have every right to make these demands.

Therefore, to meet people's growing expectations, the administrative apparatus must learn to work in close concert with the panchayati raj institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such decentralization will revitalize both our democracy and our developmental process.

Before I conclude, I ask you to join me in paying our tributes to the brave Indian jawans who have just beaten back the enemy and defended our borders. They were led brilliantly by our valiant officers. In the war against poverty and underdevelopment, you too are the officers who have to lead from the front. I ask you to show the same dedication to duty as your brother officers have showed in the icy peaks of Kargil.

I wish you all the best in your work.

Commitment to Faster Socio-economic Development

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to inaugurate the 72nd Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). I thank your President for the kind words he has spoken about me. Let me confess that the smooth manner in which FICCI and other such organizations conduct their elections make me feel envious. You even elect the next President here itself, so that everyone knows who is the next one in line. As you know, I am here after a long and gruelling election campaign.

In spite of all the turmoil, dust and drama, the recent parliamentary elections have once again made India proud. The world has yet again seen the strength of Indian democracy. India's prestige has gone up even in the international business community. This is not surprising. There is a very close, symbiotic relationship between democracy and development. All the forward-looking thinkers of the world have recognized that sustainable economic and social development is possible only in a developed democracy. The laws of economy and business have to be subservient to the more fundamental laws of society, in which people always and everywhere aspire to shape their destiny in conditions of freedom and democracy.

I have no doubt in my mind that the successful nations of the up-coming century and the next millennium will be those who adopt, protect, and promote democracy, while simultaneously pursuing pro-enterprise economic policies. India is well positioned in this regard. Look back at all the golden

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi at the Annual Session of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), New Delhi, 20 November 1999

eras of our history. The common elements that we find have three inter-related features:

- First, prosperity for all has always been the result of a long spell of peace, stability and good governance;
- Second, our farmers, traders and businessmen showed great dynamism and the governing set-up facilitated them to reach their full potential for growth;
- At the same time, and this is very important, the wealthy productive classes in agriculture, trade and industry showed an enlightened approach—not following the path of greed and pomp, but helping the society in the spirit of compassion, fellowship and philanthropy.

This is history's lesson for today's India. We must once again revive and reactivate those common elements—of course, in today's vastly different national and international conditions. If we are able to do that, India will not only succeed in rapidly eradicating poverty, unemployment and all the vestiges of underdevelopment, but also become, once again, a resurgent nation in the next millennium.

Distinguished Indian businessmen, I look upon you as partners of our Government in the march towards this developmental ideal. I cannot overemphasize the very high expectations of our people. I have been in politics for a long time, but never in the past had I seen such hunger for development among our people, especially in villages and in the deprived areas of our towns and cities, as I did in the recent elections. The eager, expectant look in the eyes of the voters is etched in my mind. Their demanding voices echo in my ears. Their needs are simple and basic. People everywhere want water, power, better roads, better hospitals—above all, they want employment. This legitimate democratic urge simply cannot be ignored any longer.

This all-important aim will be achieved only by faster and more balanced economic growth that removes both regional

and social disparities. I am convinced that faster growth—and we have set a target of seven to eight per cent each year—is possible only through faster reforms. We have shown our commitment to the reform process in our previous 17-month stint in office. We will accelerate and expand this process in the next phase of economic, administrative and legal reforms. Financial sector reforms, with the necessary supportive legislative changes, will be an important element of this process.

Most sectors of India's economy are recovering fast. I congratulate Indian industry and business—the employees, managers, entrepreneurs and investors—for their good performance this year. I am, especially, heartened by the shining successes of many of our young entrepreneurs in infotech and other industries. I am confident that you will take bigger and faster strides ahead in the coming year. The President's Address to Parliament has laid down the broad directions of the Government's agenda of action for accelerated socio-economic development. I do not wish to speak more on it since time-bound implementation of the Agenda will speak for itself in the weeks and months to come.

Last year, speaking on this occasion, I had announced several important initiatives in the Telecom Sector. As you are aware, the Government has made significant progress in implementing them. The New Telecom Policy, 1999, was formulated and adopted in a record time—and, I must emphasise, in the most transparent and participative manner.

I know that several problems still persist in Telecom Sector. They include, among other things, the need to strengthen the TRAI through suitable legislative amendment; replacement of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, with a new comprehensive law that fully reflects the revolutionary convergence of Telecom, computers, televisions, and electronics; and a clear roadmap for corporatization of the Department of the Telecom Services. There are also problems to be resolved in the implementation of the ISP Policy for achieving rapid spread of the Internet in India, especially through liberalization of the Gateway Policy.

A group under the chairmanship of finance minister, Shri Yashwant Sinha, will be constituted to quickly address these and other related issues.

It was again from this very platform last year that I had announced the ambitious National Highway Project, involving the East-West and North-South corridors. Although some work has already begun on this project, I realize that we need a clear programme, with specific time targets, to accelerate the pace of its implementation. The reconstituted Group on Infrastructure will urgently address this issue. This project, along with our renewed thrust on housing construction and agro-processing, will create large-scale employment across the country.

Much concern is being voiced on the fiscal health of our economy. The condition of the finances of States, especially, fills us with great worry. Bringing fiscal discipline, both at the Centre and in States, will receive high priority. The Centre has already initiated several initiatives on tax reforms and expenditure management. The State Governments must act decisively to cooperate with the Centre in implementing these measures to replenish their finances. Your President, Shri Sudhir Jalan, has reminded me of the hard legislative and administrative tasks ahead of the Government. Of course, he has sugarcoated the reminder with words of praise—saying, “if any Government can grapple with these challenges, your Government can”. To this, I can only respond by saying that, “yes, our Government will”.

However, bridging the gap between people's expectations and Government's performance does not entail only the governmental machinery to realise its duty. It also demands that business and industry fulfil their obligations. Specifically:

- Indian business establishments should quickly restructure themselves to bring greater efficiencies, protect the interests of their consumers, and improve the quality of their products to compete aptly in the global market.
- They should contribute fully in strengthening the social

infrastructure for their employees and for the community in which they operate, through the spread of education, health-care, housing and sanitation.

- They should deal with small and medium entrepreneurs in an appropriate manner, assisting them in their growth needs, since these have a far greater potential to create employment.
- They should fulfil their obligations to mitigate the sufferings of the ordinary people in times of natural calamities. I say this because, although Indian business has contributed to the national effort to help cyclone-ravaged Orissa, I believe that it can do much more.

I cannot emphasize too much the need for the business community to meet these obligations. Doing so will generate greater goodwill among the common people for all of you. At stake here is the pace of economic reforms. We will not be able to build adequate support for reforms unless the Government and business together can demonstrate that they benefit the poorest and the most deprived. The converse is also true, the more we can show that reforms benefit everybody and that they are contributing to the nation's healthy development, the more mass support can be generated for their speedier implementation. In a democracy, nothing sustainable can be achieved without people's support. We especially need their backing for some of the difficult but necessary reforms that Shri Jalan has referred to in his speech.

I conclude by saying that the road ahead is very difficult, but the journey is highly rewarding. Unless we traverse it firmly and fast, we will not get to where we want to—especially because any slowness on our part will mean that the rest of the world will leave us behind. Taking the hundred crore people of India together with us, let the Government and Indian business travel together on the road of reforms to the next century and millennium—the road to a strong, prosperous, and caring India.

India is on the Move

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to be with you at the opening session of the India Economic Summit, organized by the World Economic Forum and CII. I, especially, welcome all the foreign delegates and wish them a pleasant stay in Delhi's cool December climate.

I am sure, however, that the attention of all of you is focused on the hot topic of globalization, especially in view of the heat generated by the goings on in Seattle—both inside and outside the negotiating halls. This is only natural. We are now into the last month of this century. But, there is a universal realization that the world is transiting not only from one century into another, not only from one millennium into another, but also from one era of international economic relations into another.

Suddenly, all nations find themselves far more interdependent today, especially in trade and economy, than ever before. This phenomenon of globalization is certain to further increase inter-dependence in the coming century. In an unequal world, however, inter-dependence tends to get distorted into a relationship between the dominant and the dependent. Such a relationship is fundamentally unacceptable in an age that has come to accept freedom, democracy, equality, and pluralism as universal values.

In the circumstances, I regret the failure at WTO talks in Seattle. The need for negotiated settlement of trade issues between nations not on dominance and unilateral advantage, is obvious. A spirit of consensus and avoidance of linking trade with extraneous issues is necessary to reach a settlement. Developing and large populated countries like India have core interests to protect. India will do that. Rich nations should be sensitive to this reality. India looks forward with renewed anxiety to resumption of talks soon. Naturally, the diverse

peoples and cultures of the world today view globalization with both expectation and apprehension. Expectation, because the world has clearly seen the benefits of global trade and economic growth. At the same time, there is also apprehension because of the continuing inequalities and imbalances and their consequences for regional and international security.

As we all know, many of the conflicts in this and in the preceding centuries had their roots in the unjust, unequal, and exploitative nature of the trade and economic relations between countries. The phenomenon of colonialism, which has happily come to an end in our time, also arose out of the dynamics of economic exploitation. The worst manifestation of the flaws in the system of global trade and economy were the two World Wars. These brought untold misery to all the countries—poor as well as rich.

This brief review of the past points to a cautionary lesson of history for all of us as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century.

The greatest challenge before all those in governance, business, and administration is to steer the growth in global trade, business, and economy along the lines of fairness, equity, and sustainability. If we want globalization to deliver the desired boons in the next century, our watchwords have to be:

- The good of all, and not the greed of a few;
- Long-term growth and not short-term gains;
- Cooperation based on complementary strengths and not conflict rooted in unhealthy competition.

The decade of the nineties has shown that the circle of popular acceptance for market-driven but well-regulated economic reforms is constantly expanding all over the world. People both in developing and developed countries are willing to support liberalization and globalization, provided they are credibly reassured:

- That these reforms will benefit everybody, especially the poorest and the most disadvantaged;
- That the environment will be protected;

- That their cherished national and cultural identities will be preserved.

It is not the responsibility of governments and politicians alone to voice these concerns and address them sincerely, especially since the role of government itself is rightly being re-defined everywhere. Business associations, both national and global, must also fully participate in this effort. This is necessary for the future good of business itself. To speak in your own language, dear businessmen—the more business cares for the world, the more will the world reduce the risks and enhance the returns of business.

This calls for a fundamentally new relationship between governments and businesses. I call this relationship the Dharma of Partnership. No longer can the two have divergent, much less, conflicting goals. Our roles are complementary and convergent to serve the common goal of promoting people's welfare. The concept of partnership imposes certain common obligations on governments and businesses. One of them is accountability towards people. For example, I often ask myself—why should only government's and people's elected representatives be expected to be accountable for their actions? Should not businesses also be accountable to the people and the community—and not only to the limited group of shareholders?

As a matter of fact, the very meaning of private ownership of business has undergone a fundamental change in our times. In one way or the other, the public owns most contemporary businesses, even though it may not be directly involved in managing or running them. In such a situation, it is inconceivable, that businesses can legitimately pursue objectives that do not, ultimately, serve the collective good.

I am happy to note that the World Economic Forum and the CII have contributed significantly to a fruitful dialogue on these wider concerns through its annual summits.

India is now set firmly on a faster growth path. Our government has resolved to follow a bold, pro-growth programme of economic reforms. Our goal is to achieve a

sustainable rate of growth of seven to eight percent, which is necessary to make a quick and visible reduction in poverty, unemployment, and regional imbalances. Faster socio-economic development is the common cry all over India. I am confident that we will fulfil our people's aspirations to a substantial extent in the next five years. We are fully aware of the formidable challenges involved in reaching higher rates of growth and sustaining them over a prolonged period. We know not only the problems of development, but also the approach to solving them.

Today, there is a growing multi-party consensus in India that the solution to many of our developmental problems lies in further economic reforms. The closing years of the nineties will be recorded as the time when India took the path of reforms with conviction and confidence. Armed with a renewed mandate from the people of India in recent elections, our government has begun to formulate appropriate policies, programmes, and legislative initiatives. I am sure the business community in India and abroad have taken due note of the passage of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Bill and the Foreign Exchange Management Bill in the Lower House of Parliament last week.

With this major success behind us, we shall now embark on such other financial sector reforms as will further improve the efficiencies in our banks, financial institutions, and stock markets. Our Government will also move decisively in other important areas such as the power sector, telecom sector, ports, airports, and highways. We are determined to speedily increase the size of the export basket and also to diversify its contents. Our emphasis now will be improving decision-making and implementation of policies and projects, to make all these sectors more attractive to private sector and foreign investment. Towards this end, the government shall radically simplify rules and procedures that cause delays.

Our Government has identified information technology as an area of immense promise for wealth creation and hence, needing special focus. The world today fully recognizes the potential as well as the performance of Indians in software

development. Many of their success stories have so far been written abroad. But, of late as you know, they are being scripted in India as well. Our government is determined to create the necessary conditions that will enable bright and enterprising young Indians to re-create the "Magic of Silicon Valley" while living and working in India.

Distinguished businessmen, I can sum up the brief narration of the government's multi-faceted initiatives in the economic sphere in just five words—"India is on the Move". The experience of the last decade of this century has given us many useful tips on how India can move faster in the first decade of the next century. The world will soon see the emergence of a strong and prosperous India, in which the basic needs of all her one billion children will have been fully met.

As economically resurgent, India will be a source of stability and long-term growth for the world economy. It will also contribute significantly to the emergence of a fair and equitable system of global trade and business, serving as a reliable basis for universal peace and prosperity tomorrow. In this endeavour to achieve self-growth and global growth, India actively seeks the participation of the international business community. If India is already a good business proposition, I can assure you that it will be an even better one in the times to come.

Create More Successful Information Technology Business in India

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to launch the National Venture Capital Fund of Software and Information Technology. I heartily

Speech while launching the National Venture Capital Fund of Software and IT, New Delhi, 10 December 1999

congratulate the Ministry for Information Technology, IDBI, and SIDBI for this laudable venture to make venture capital available to promising talent in this sunrise sector. I especially commend the newly formed IT Ministry for this maiden initiative. It appears to have begun with a bang. The more I get to know about what is happening in the field of Information Technology, the more it seems to me that IT is the newest area of adventure, both in science and in business. However, this adventure needs capital of a unique kind- namely, venture capital. This is because software, biotechnology, and other knowledge-based enterprises carry great risks, but also greater rewards.

What transforms risks into rewards are ideas, competence, and confidence. Our young people in software and information technology have all three in ample measure. The only thing that they usually, lack is capital. That is because most of them are first-generation business people, often coming from middle-class families. This is where the adventure of venture capital begins.

In the past few years, Indian IT companies have written many shining success stories. Indeed, not a week passes without a new success story making the headlines. Until recently, many of these were scripted by Indian professionals and entrepreneurs settled abroad. It is heartening that we now have many homegrown high achievers. All this has created tremendous excitement not only in stockmarkets, but also in schools, colleges, homes and wherever young people gather and talk about their own and their country's future. The spirit of "We too can do it" is spreading fast. I hear young and ambitious IT professionals telling me that if Indians can make miracles in Silicon Valley, so can they in Indian cities and towns. This is where venture capital funds can step in to turn these dreams into reality. I am happy that many Indian banks and financial institutions are in the process of setting up similar venture funds. I wish them success and assure them that the Government will facilitate their efforts through appropriate supportive measures.

Our Government has decided to create conditions that will enable more and more successful IT enterprises to grow on Indian soil—and to grow world-class. This is necessary not only for wealth creation, but also for employment generation. In addition, it will help reduce regional and social disparities. Friends, this fund is a new initiative by the Government in a territory that is uncharted. I would therefore, urge its promoters to learn and adopt best international practices in managing this fund. It should not be run in a bureaucratic manner. If necessary, we should further modify and improve its operations by learning from successful venture funds abroad, where these have sunk deeper roots.

Yesterday, I was happy to meet a delegation of The Indus Entrepreneurs Group from Silicon Valley. As you know, they have amassed very useful experience in promoting and managing venture capital for new IT companies. Indeed, they have progressed beyond the traditional concept of venture capital into a superior idea of "angel funds". I am told that these angel funds, created by successful and established Indian IT businessmen in the United States, are used to nurture talented youngsters almost as a caring father would teach the ropes to his young son. More valuable than money is the advice and consultancy that angel fund managers provide to startup companies on a sustained basis until they stand on their own legs. In a sense, this concept is not altogether new or alien to India. Throughout India's history, those of our communities who traditionally engage in business have tended to support new entrants with not only financial assistance, but also precious advice and wisdom.

I have no doubt that the growth of venture capital funds will gain momentum in the coming years. But, I especially look forward to seeing the spread of angel fund culture in Indian IT industry. I am confident that the Rs. 100-crore National Venture Capital Fund that we are starting today will launch many successful new IT businesses.

Make India a Knowledge Superpower

IT IS A pleasure to be here this evening at the Global Meeting on "India in the Knowledge Millennium". It is significant that this meeting is being held on the eve of the new millennium. It is often said that the first industrial revolution bypassed India. Let it not be said that India was not in the vanguard of the "knowledge revolution" that will shape the destiny of nations in the 21st century. To ensure this, we have to act now—and act in a concerted manner.

I would therefore, like to commend the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) for organizing this event, focused on the catalytic effect of the "knowledge revolution" in the Indian context. Distinguished experts in this field have gathered here to share their thoughts during the next few days. I am sure their deliberations will prove useful for devising key strategies by both industry and government.

As we all know, the advent of knowledge-intensive business and governance in the latter part of the closing decade of this century is a result of unimagined advancements of technology and enterprise management. This, more than anything else, has changed the process of economic and industrial evolution globally. As a result, traditional forces of production—land, labour, and capital—are of lesser value today compared to "knowledge capital".

This expansion of the "production frontier" has led to the establishment of a knowledge-based economy. Led by information technology, this "new economy" includes areas such as biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, consultancy operations,

Speech at ASSOCHAM's Global Meeting, New Delhi, 18 December 1999

and financial services. The key characteristics of knowledge economy are quick changing technology bases and high degree of flexibility. The critical success factors of knowledge management are operational efficiency in innovation, ability to leverage cumulative expertise of the work force, and quick response to rapidly shifting market conditions.

India has the potential to develop strong competitive advantages in this sector, notably through its skill and enterprise in information technology, of which software is the key component. However, total quality management of knowledge would require very different enabling environments, and herein lies the key to harness the knowledge and skill base, which India enjoys, nourished as it were for the last more than five millennia.

To make India a "knowledge superpower" will require concerted efforts on a number of fronts. Important among them are:

- Leveraging of existing competencies in IT, telecom, biotechnology, drug design, financial services, and enterprise management;
- Global networking;
- Education for developing a learning society;
- Vibrant government-industry-academia interaction in policy-making and implementation; and,
- Economic and business strategic alliances built on capabilities and opportunities.

All these have to be coupled with constant monitoring to make periodic but timely corrections so as to achieve the desired goals.

The leveraging of existing competencies entails not just laying stress on growth as a critical factor. One has to emphasize

on building the innovative potential of individual organizations and its people, whether it is the government or the private sector. The globalization of business and information processes has resulted in new trends of thought driven by the need to manage the knowledge thrown up by information systems and databases. Some areas of thought and indeed practice have become redundant or obsolete, while others have undergone refinement and taken entirely new dimensions. Thus, the power of immediate networking, unrestrained by distance and culture, through the Internet has completely altered the basic premises of business and governance today. All this has happened in the last five years.

I am reminded of an incident from the life of the great scientist Meghnad Saha. Two weeks in a row, he set the same questions while testing his students. In the second week, a student pointed out the identical nature, and hence the futility, of the test. To this Meghnad Saha replied, "The questions are same, but the answers have changed".

This is the crux—the ultimate *mantra*, the whole truth.

In the new millennium, we have to find new answers to old problems. Simultaneously, we have to seek solutions to new challenges.

The basic challenge of poverty eradication and building a just and equitable social order that enables individuals to fully realize their true potential, will remain the central theme of our development initiatives.

A knowledge-based society will enable us to leapfrog in finding new and innovative ways to meet this crucial challenge and seek urgent solutions. The key to these solutions, as always, would be the ability to apply knowledge as the primary means to secure competitive advantage and regenerate it on a continuing basis. The 21st century will belong to learning nations and knowledge people.

To meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of the 21st century, we have to start building now. Or it will be too late. My government is committed to developing such a nation. I call upon all to do their bit in the whole process.

This brings me to the role of industry. Industrial growth and exports have shown a significant upward trend. An environment is being built through a series of reforms initiated by my government to unshackle the power of the individual as well as the organization.

Whether it is financial reforms, industrial liberalization, or development of infrastructure, including the crucial telecom sector, my government has been addressing them with the urgency they deserve. The excitement and optimism generated by our unimagined growth in the IT sector is for all to see. It is but one manifestation of a successful coming together of government putting in place an enabling environment and the redoubtable skills and excellence of our indigenous talent.

However, we need to ensure that this success is not limited to the IT sector, but extends to other areas of production and services through greater participation of all in the growth process. Herein lies the path ahead. Industry has to rethink its management processes in order to create more competitive organizations. It will have to use the tool of knowledge, drawn from existing and newly built resources. This, perhaps, is the key to success.

Newer methods of financing, information sharing, and information building need to be evaluated. Efforts on brand building and brand promotion will have to be undertaken in a focused manner. The task before us is huge. But it can be achieved with diligence and commitment.

Commitment towards increasing industrial productivity, securing greater market share in existing as well as emerging markets, expanding the base of players, developing new

technologies, and cutting down turn-around time. The ASSOCHAM President, in his address, has raised some points regarding government. I will briefly touch upon them.

Immediately after my government was sworn in, our agenda for socio-economic change was made public. We stressed on our commitment towards greater fiscal discipline and expenditure control. I would like to disabuse your minds of any apprehensions you may have on these issues. As for population stabilization, we do realize that it needs to be taken up with great urgency. My government is working on a National Population Policy that will be made public soon.

We have already achieved a fair measure of success in generating awareness and securing consensus in the area of economic reforms. A lot more remains to be done, particularly in speeding up the implementation process. While the past gives us hope, we have to transcend its limitations for a more progressive tomorrow.

Our country enjoys comparative advantages to emerge as a strong knowledge-based economy. We need to harness those advantages. Only then can our collective vision of making India a leader of the new millennium be realized. Only then can India lead the third revolution—the “knowledge revolution”.

I thank you for this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you. In less than a fortnight, we shall enter a New Year and a New Age. I take this opportunity to wish everybody a prosperous and very happy 2000.

Growth Must be Sustained and Accelerated

I WELCOME YOU to this first meeting of the reconstituted Economic Advisory Council. This Council was constituted in August 1998 with the objective of promoting a broad exchange of views with eminent economists on significant economic issues. And to provide an input in our decision making process for the management of the economy. Two meetings of the erstwhile Council were held. The exchange of views proved useful both in shaping national perceptions and in the evolution of our own thinking about the economy. However, our interaction was interrupted by political uncertainties leading to the General Election.

Shortly after the formation of the new Government, the economic and social issues, which represent our priority were identified and articulated in the President's Address to Parliament on October 25, 1999. That Address deals with both the short-term and the medium-term concerns of Government. And broadly lays down the developmental objectives, which we have set for ourselves.

Since the Council last met, there are many positive features of the economy that deserve mention. After a period of sluggishness, there has been a positive upturn in the economy. According to the latest estimates from the Central Statistical Organization received a few days ago, GDP growth in the second quarter was up 6 percent as against 4.2 per cent in the corresponding period of the last fiscal and 5.9 per cent in the first quarter. The recovery is broad based, led by better performance in the services, manufacturing and construction sectors. Inflation has remained well under control. Our balance

Speech at the first meeting of the reconstituted Economic Advisory Council, New Delhi, 8 January 2000

of payments position has remained comfortable and our foreign exchange reserves are at a record level of nearly \$ 35 billion. There is good reason to believe that the year will end with a GDP growth in the range of 6 to 6.5 per cent.

These gains are both positive and satisfying. However, the growth process must be sustainable and accelerated over the coming years. Optimism should not yield ground to complacency. A lot remains to be done. We face a host of problems and concerns which require to be addressed both in the short as well as in the medium term.

A number of initiatives, however, are beginning to yield results. For instance, the Task Force on Infrastructure under the Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission has now laid down a clear road map for the National Highways Development Project. I have been informed that out of the total length of about 5,950 kilometres of the Golden Quadrilateral, work on about 500



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the first meeting of the reconstituted Economic Advisory Council, New Delhi, 8 January 2000

kilometres is complete and further work for about a thousand kilometres is being awarded. The balance work will be awarded during the next two years. The work on the Golden Quadrilateral will be completed by 2004. I am asking the Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission to advance the time schedule by one year. In respect of the North-South-East-West corridors comprising of a total length of 7,300 kilometres, work on a modest 630 kilometres is complete, and the programme for the construction of the remaining stretches is being firmed up. The Government will also introduce a Bill in Parliament for the creation of a dedicated fund based on the cess on petrol and diesel to enable leveraging of finance for this large project.

I have also been told that the programme for corporatization of major ports and private participation in the ports sector has been finalized. The Government will also shortly consider a proposal of the ministry of civil aviation for long-term lease of some important airports enabling private participation in the civil aviation sector.

In the area of telecom, a lot has been achieved in the last one year. I am determined that India must realize its full potential as a dominant Information Technology power. For this, subsisting problems in the telecom sector need to be resolved. Issues relating to technological convergence between telecom, broadcasting and Information Technology also need to be addressed. We have constituted a Group on Telecom and IT Convergence under the finance minister to ensure that these bottlenecks are resolved at the earliest. I am informed that the Group is making good progress. For instance, the Sub-Group under the minister of information and broadcasting will submit its report on TRAI related issues by the middle of this month. Successful entrepreneurs from the Silicon Valley who met me recently assured me that given the right policy framework, India has the potential not only of attracting large investments in this area but this may indeed be our strategy to address the problems of poverty, illiteracy and health in rural areas. We must grasp this opportunity without losing time.

Evenwhile initiatives in many areas are continuing elsewhere, it may be useful if you could focus today on some issues of continuing concern.

First is the issue of fiscal consolidation. The fiscal deficit is unacceptably high. It needs to be addressed urgently through reduction in Government expenditure, and improvement in revenue collection and the tax-GDP ratio. Rationalization and reduction of subsidies, both direct and indirect, must be an integral part of this effort. A number of steps have already been indicated in the President's Address to Parliament including, inter alia, the constitution of an Expenditure Commission and a Task Force on Tax Reforms. Like in so many other areas, there is convergence on broad principles. The question, however, is—what is practical? And what can be done given the constraints of a government working in a parliamentary framework with a federal system like ours? We need to ensure that the changes being sought are not socially disruptive. I solicit your views in this regard.

Second is the issue of state finances. The fiscal situation in the states is a matter of great concern. State government finances are facing continuous pressures. There are shortfalls in revenue collection and increase of expenditure as a result of the implementation of the Pay Commission award. A majority of the states are today exhibiting serious structural weaknesses. These include disproportionate increase in revenue expenditure, inadequate capital expenditure, inadequate growth in tax and non-tax incomes, unsustainable revenue and fiscal deficits, and a very high level of debt. The problem gets compounded by issues of equity. The more advanced states are better placed to adopt sensible policies, which attract investment and foster growth. In the process, the backward States tend to become weaker and more handicapped. What corrective policies are possible in the context of our constitutional federal structure for putting State finances in order? What kind of role can the Central Government play to persuade and nudge the State Governments into adopting the right policies? I seek your advice on this issue.

Third, while we all agree that expeditious restructuring and disinvestment of public sector undertakings is an essential aspect of economic reforms, the process of disinvestment continues to be a contentious issue. We have recently set up a new Department of Disinvestment in order to bring greater clarity to the process. However, the procedure that the new Department should follow to ensure transparency in the process of disinvestment as well as expeditious implementation of the decision to disinvest, requires a wider consensus. I would like to have your suggestions in this regard.

Fourth, I have said on more occasions than one, that financial sector reforms need priority attention. We have taken some steps. Regulatory and prudential requirements for financial institutions, banks, and NBFCs have been tightened. However, these steps are clearly inadequate, and there are still problems of weak commercial banks and high level of non-performing assets. What further steps should we take in the short and medium term to carry forward the reform of banks and financial institutions?

Finally, as you are all aware, the finance ministry has initiated the exercise for the preparation of the Budget for the new fiscal year. Some of you have given your advice to the finance minister a few days ago. Those of you who could not do so can consider doing so today.

I have deliberately raised some issues, which are of general concern. I realize that this is not a complete inventory but they are important enough to deserve immediate attention. A consensus on the measures, which government should adopt on these issues will help us in firming up our approach. And in the articulation of our policies and strategies to effectively address them. I look forward to hearing your views.

Promotion of Information Technology—A Strategic Goal of Government

I AM HAPPY to be once again in the company of our friends from Silicon Valley. It is heartening that I have an opportunity to meet some new Indian high achievers in the global information technology arena. I commend the efforts of the Ministry of IT and NASSCOM for increasing both the depth and regularity of interaction between Indian entrepreneurs and their counterparts in Silicon Valley. This has also increased the interaction between the Government and honoured guests like you.

The new Ministry for IT under Shri Pramod Mahajan has already begun its work to serve as a facilitator and promoter of Indian IT industry. I assure you that you will continue to hear good news from the IT Ministry and other related ministries in the realization of our common objectives. The entire Government—indeed, the entire country—has now adopted promotion of IT as its strategic goal. In my interaction with some of you last time, I was happy to note your keen interest in promoting venture capital and joint ventures in IT, Biotechnology, and telecom. We heartily welcome your participation in this endeavour.

The Ministry of IT has already taken the commendable step of starting a venture capital fund. This is still a nascent activity in India. You have valuable experience in this area. You have also become “angel investors” for other start-up businesses by promising Indians. We would like to see this admirable phenomenon replicating itself in India in a very short time.

Speech welcoming a group of IT experts from Silicon Valley, New Delhi,
13 January 2000

Your suggestions and ideas on the growth of venture capital in India as a tool to promote high-tech and high-value investment are welcome.

Information Technology is all about new ideas; it is also all about the speed with which these ideas are converted into new products and services. We in India must aim at accelerating both the creation of intellectual capital and its transformation into world-class enterprises. The successes of Indian IT industry, both in India and abroad, have given a very high profile to our country as a torchbearer in this frontier area of technology and enterprise. The benefits of this for India go well beyond IT. They reinforce the image of India as a modern, forward-looking, and forward-moving nation that is determined to achieve excellence in every area of human endeavour.

There is a tremendous potential in our young men and women—including those in rural areas and those coming from poor and socially deprived families. Thanks to your successes, they are also becoming more and more ambitious and self-confident. It is this ambition and self-confidence among our youth that is the greatest guarantor of India's rapid all-round development. To me, the true barometer of success of all that we are doing in IT is how much it contributes to removing poverty, and social and regional imbalances. Let us not lose sight of this strategic imperative in all our efforts.

I am happy that an agreement has been signed to foster institutional co-operation between the IT Ministry and Stanford University, which is the nucleus of much of the intellectual activity in Silicon Valley. This co-operation would be a key enabler in forging interaction between industry, academia, financial professionals, and the Government from India and United States.

I conclude by welcoming you once again.

Synergize Our Needs with Available Resources

I AM HAPPY to be present here today at the World Congress for Sustainable Development that has been convened to discuss key global issues and concerns. For developing countries like India, the issue of sustainable development has gained importance in recent years, especially in the context of globalization.

The Rio Conference of 1992 launched a global partnership on environment and development. It was acknowledged that sustained economic growth, eradication of poverty, and the attempt to meet the basic needs of the people constitute the over-riding priorities for developing countries. No development process can be sustainable unless it leads to visible and widespread improvement in these areas.

It was also agreed at the Rio Conference that concerted international action is needed to ensure global prosperity and better quality of life for all. In the years following the Rio Conference, several initiatives have been taken to address the pressing problems of today, aiming at preparing the world for the emerging challenges of the 21st century, which we have just entered.

Developing countries need a favourable international economic environment, combined with financial and technical assistance, favourable terms of trade, access to markets, and transfer of environmentally sound technologies to supplement their efforts in achieving sustainable development.

Given the limited resources available to them, developing countries are doing their best to achieve that national economic

Speech at the World Congress for Sustainable Development, Calcutta, 20 January 2000

security, which alone can provide the global environmental security that we all seek. Since the Rio Conference, developing countries have made considerable progress in their efforts towards achieving sustainable development. India has not lagged behind.

My Government has adopted an ambitious programme to fight the battle against poverty, illiteracy, and disease. We are committed to the goal of providing a better quality of life to our citizens by ensuring access to basic health care, primary education, clean drinking water, and shelter. These goals form the core of our social development initiatives.

At the same time, we are also committed to rapid economic development and creation of infrastructure for sustained growth. The present infrastructure is expected to expand at a much more accelerated rate. This expansion is especially necessary in the energy, telecommunications, and transport sectors.

However, all these development activities must not be allowed to result in severe depletion of natural resources and degradation of our environment. We must synergize our needs with the availability of natural resources.

Policies and programmes aimed at sustainable development call for considerable co-ordination given the complexity of the many organizations, both private and government, that are involved in the development process.

We need to ensure smooth co-ordination so that projects are not held up or fall through due to inordinate delays caused by conflicting views among the organizations.

An important input for sustained economic growth is technology. New and efficient technologies are essential to achieve sustainable development. Moreover, technology upgradation is required for providing Indian enterprises with global competitiveness in the era of liberalization.

To ensure regular and timely technology upgradation, it is

necessary that enterprises have information on relevant technologies available in the international market and, also, within the country. No less important is the need to ensure that this technology is environment friendly.

Environmentally sound technology encompasses a total system, which includes know-how, procedures, energy supplies, energy technologies.

Bearing this in mind, we need to invest in—and, therefore, increase—our research and development capacity since this is crucial for effective dissemination of environmentally sound technologies and their generation locally.

We have to focus attention on some key areas in this regard. They are:

- 1) Access to information on state-of-the-art technologies;
- 2) A framework for dissemination of information on the sources of availability of environmentally sound technologies;
- 3) Development of guidelines for transfer of technologies; and,
- 4) Training of personnel to undertake technology assessment for the management of such technologies.

The transfer of environmentally sound technologies from the industrialized to the developing countries has come to be seen as a major element of global strategies to achieve sustainable development. However, and regrettably so, the international commitment for the transfer of technology on "Concessional and Preferential Terms" has remained only as a concept on paper.

On the other hand, the industrialized countries are transferring highly polluting technologies to the developing countries as "Proven Technology" or as "Low Cost Technology". It is, therefore, imperative that the international community evolves an effective and meaningful mechanism to ensure

transfer of environmentally sound technologies to the developing countries at concessional and preferential terms.

In this context, India welcomes the Clean Development Mechanism that is being negotiated under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. The latter provides for foreign investment and transfer of technology to developing countries for reducing green house gas emissions as part of the developed countries' commitment to limit their emissions to certain levels.

I wish to stress here that it is in the interest of our global environment and our future generations that the negotiations in this direction are concluded within the deadline of November 2000.

In order to strengthen the technological capabilities of the various sectors of our economy, both for meeting national needs and for providing global competitiveness to our industry, a number of initiatives have been launched in the country. Some of these are: research on the design of catalytic converters and introduction of battery-operated vehicles in urban areas, use of alternative fuels and improving the quality of fuel.

Here, I wish to touch upon a crucial sector of our economy—the small and rural industrial sector, which together produce a large number of items used by the common man and provide employment to millions of people. This sector needs to be enriched with appropriate technology that is cheap, clean and efficient.

In recent years, though Indian business and industry have made significant efforts including investment of considerable resources in the development of environmental management systems and environmentally sound technologies towards reducing the impact of industrial activity on our national environment, much more still needs to be done.

A Technology Development Board has been set up with

the mandate to facilitate development of new technologies, apart from assimilation and adaptation of imported technologies by providing catalytic support to industries and Research and Development institutions to work in partnership.

I would urge business and industry associations to actively associate themselves with Government programmes so that rapid progress can be made towards achieving the goal of environmentally sustainable development.

The crucial task of institutionalizing sustainable development in India is being achieved by strengthening institutions and governing structures concerned with environment and social infrastructure management. My Government is looking at certain critical areas in which such activities need to be pursued with greater vigour than before, and which can be achieved with the co-operation of industry and technological experts.

For, it is only with the co-operation of all, be it industry, the scientific community, voluntary organizations, or local communities, that Government can respond suitably to the challenges of economic and sustainable development.

India is proud of her large reservoir of scientific and technical manpower that is second to none in competence. The Institution of Engineers symbolizes this talent and I commend its effort in organizing this World Congress. It gives me great pleasure that our engineers and technologists have come forward to help India attain the goal of sustainable development.

I look forward to the World Congress for Sustainable Development coming up with appropriate sustainable development strategies and ideas.

New Work Ethos Needed for Industrial Resurgence

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to be with you on this occasion and distribute the Shram Awards for 1998.

I congratulate the winners for showing exemplary commitment to productivity, standardization, and quality control. You have shown excellence, imagination, and resourcefulness that, I am sure, will inspire your colleagues. I also congratulate all working men and women whose contribution to the national economy is reflected in the fact that India has been performing well in virtually all sectors.

The strength of a country is measured primarily by its economic prosperity. In 1947, India inherited a colonial economy that had been designed to serve the interests of our British rulers. They systematically tapped India's wealth for their own prosperity, ignoring the well-being of India and her people.

In the last five decades, as a nation we have travelled a long distance, building up our own national economy to serve national interests. Today, the Indian economy is poised to emerge as a formidable force. Credit for this success should be shared with millions of working men and women. Their tireless labour and dedication have enabled our nation to emerge as one of the top ten countries of chief industrial importance.

I am confident that in the next few years we will further improve our position and India, now that she is firmly set on the path of industrial resurgence, will be second to none in terms of production, technological innovation and all-round

excellence. I am also confident that our engineers, architects, and mazdoors—whether highly skilled or unskilled, through their collective effort and imagination, will make India self-sufficient and self-reliant.

No effort and no contribution are larger than that of our working class. It is they who have created India's physical infrastructure, ranging from roads to buildings, ports to airports, hydroelectric projects to giant industrial complexes. They are the builders of what Pandit Nehru described as the "temples of modern India".

Indeed, a revitalized and re-energized working class can become the engine of growth and development and thus help build a strong, prosperous India, a forward moving, and forward looking nation. But, for that, we have to invest more in human resource development so that workers are able to give their best.

Of the 350 million strong workforce at present, the majority is unskilled or semi-skilled. Our labour force is growing at a rate of 2.5 percent, which is higher than the rate of growth of our population. A large number of people are entering the labour market without possessing the necessary wherewithal for effective entry to, and absorption by, the market.

Over the decades, we have built institutions like ITIs and polytechnics for skill training, skill formation, and skill upgradation. But the number of persons who have access to these institutions is not more than one million. Therefore, there is a huge gap that needs to be filled to meet the needs of the emerging workforce.

There are other reasons, too, why we must invest, and invest now, in enabling our potential workforce to acquire skills and our existing working men and women to upgrade their skills as well as acquire new skills.

Sweeping changes are taking place in the global economic environment. With the advent of the 21st century, we have

entered the information age. Against this backdrop, the acquisition of skills, in particular acquisition of knowledge-based skills, must receive unreserved support at all levels.

In the coming years, we must create a workforce that is skilled or highly skilled, and has the ingenuity and resourcefulness to adjust itself to the rapid changes in the labour market. That is the only way we can survive in the face of a fiercely competitive global environment.

The new century will witness a relentless pursuit of new knowledge, information, and skills that are of direct interest and relevance to an increasingly global economy and rapid technological change. We will also witness information technology playing an important role, reducing costs, and increasing the speed of communications. This will be a major factor in global production and integrating financial markets.

All this, in turn, will induce demand for skilled labour, necessitating higher investment in education and skill development, which are now acknowledged as vital ingredients in making economies internationally more competitive and productive. They will also help mitigate social and economic vulnerability arising out of globalization.

Thus, we need to pay greater attention to the task of setting up more responsive training systems and institutions. We need to ensure both pre-service as well as on-the-job training. There is no gainsaying that countries that have a strong institutional base in training systems will be able to adjust better to the new economic environment while others will lag behind.

Simultaneously, we also need to ensure that women have adequate and equitable access to education and training opportunities so that their representation in the nation's workforce can increase. Women constitute barely 25 percent of the total workforce today.

A variety of factors have contributed to this adverse sex

ratio in the workforce, including discrimination against women in matters of employment and wages. This adverse trend will have to be reversed.

It is true that all these steps aimed at human resource development for a more productive workforce are primarily the responsibility of government. But government's initiatives need to be supplemented and complemented by industry. Till now, industry's participation in skill training initiatives has been limited. I urge industry to substantially augment its efforts and invest more in human resource development—to meet immediate needs as well as to prepare for tomorrow's challenges.

My government has all along emphasized the importance of the working class and the human element in industrial production. We are committed to creating conditions that will encourage individual initiatives, ingenuity, resourcefulness, and skill-acquisition.

We believe that working men and women are the most important assets of our nation. We recognize their inherent potential and we shall, through our policies and programmes, harness that potential for building a strong and prosperous, forward looking, and forward moving India.

The Prime Minister's Shram Awards reflect government's recognition of the contribution by working men and women to the noble task of nation building. The 31 winners of this award today symbolize the new work ethos and culture that are needed to meet the new challenges of the new century.

I am sure their achievement will motivate workers in the organized as well as unorganized sectors and informal areas. Together, we can usher in a new era of rapid social and economic change.

Accelerating the Development of the Power Sector

I AM HAPPY to be here today to inaugurate the Conference of Power Ministers of the States. This conference assumes importance in view of the fact that power shall play a defining role in India's socio-economic development in the twenty-first century.

Our expanding industrial base, increasing agricultural demand and galloping domestic requirement necessitate rapid enhancement of India's total power generation capacity.

More importantly, we should bear in mind that power and energy production as well as management is crucial to our national security concerns. A country that is self-sufficient in power and is not burdened by energy shortages, is a secure country.

If we look back at the performance of the power sector in the past fifty years, we will find that the growth of this sector has been impressive. From a little over thousand megawatts, our total production today has gone up to around hundred thousand megawatts. This is no small achievement.

However, despite this impressive growth, we continue to face power shortages. In the Eighth Plan period, we could achieve only a little above half the target we had set ourselves. In the Ninth Plan period, we are likely to add roughly two-thirds of the additional capacity we have targeted.

The poor financial health of our State Electricity Boards and as yet inadequate private sector investment in the power sector are largely responsible for this inability to meet targets.

Speech while inaugurating the Conference of Power Ministers of the States, New Delhi, 26 February 2000

In order to meet the requirements of the opening decades of the new century, we have to add more than a lakh megawatts during the Tenth and Eleventh Plans. To achieve this target, we would need around rupees eleven lakh crore, but the resources that are likely to be available would be about only a third of that amount.

The Union Government and the State Governments, therefore, have to jointly consider various options to mobilize resources to meet the gap.

The issue of resource mobilization apart, the centre and the states also need to jointly tackle some other problems that have been plaguing the power sector and holding back rapid capacity addition. If I were to broadly list them, they would be:

- 1) Increasing power generation through renovation and modernization;
- 2) Improving the quality of power and strengthening transmission and distribution systems;
- 3) Unbundling of generation, transmission and distribution through corporatization to improve the financial health of power utilities;
- 4) Metering of all power consumption by December 31, 2001;
- 5) Privatizing distribution so that recovery can be substantially improved and pilferage reduced; and,
- 6) Changing the hydel to thermal ratio so that the system can be operated at a higher level of efficiency.

I would also urge you to deliberate on inter-regional transfer of power so that power deficit regions can benefit from the power surplus regions. This, in fact, calls for urgent attention as we are yet to ensure uniform distribution of power resources.

Our government has listed the restructuring and reforming of the power sector as a priority initiative. We have already taken several measures in this regard.

We have been emphasizing on the development of hydel power, especially by developing projects in the north-east that have immense potential. We are also committed to strengthening

the National Power Grid and delinking transmission and distribution from generation so that we can ensure both reliability and quality of power to consumers.

We need to take a hard look at the financial health of our State Electricity Boards. Of the twenty State Electricity Boards, eighteen have a negative rate of return. This continues to be a major concern for both the union government as well as the state governments.

The financial health of the State Electricity Boards can be gauged from the fact that their commercial losses have mounted four times in the last ten years. However, I am happy to note that the State Electricity Boards of Karnataka and Maharashtra are in better health.

It is often suggested that subsidies are a solution to our problems. But experience has shown that subsidies do not work beyond a point. On the contrary, they have not only affected the performance of the power sector but also resulted in unreliable and poor quality of electricity. I have no doubt that consumers today would much rather pay for reliable and quality power.

As part of the reform and restructuring process, we have to break with the mindset of the past and give up the idea of monolithic State Electricity Boards. We have to also pursue active private sector participation in power generation, transmission, and distribution. I am happy to note that the State Electricity Boards have been restructured in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh. A number of other States are also engaged in the restructuring process.

I understand that a draft bill for reforming the power sector has been circulated among you. Your views on the draft bill will be a critical input for decision-making in this regard.

I look forward to the conference resulting in an agreed upon blueprint for accelerated development of the power sector.

III

Defence

Agni—Symbol of Resurgent India

I AM HAPPY to inform you that the advanced version of Agni, India's Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM), was test-fired this morning. The test was successful on every count.

On behalf of all of you, I congratulate and express our deep appreciation to the team of Indian scientists, technicians, jawans, and other defence personnel for this historic achievement. With today's success, they have once again shown that they are second to none in the world.

Agni is a tribute to their dedication and teamwork. It is also a vindication of our steadfast commitment to self-reliance. In a rapidly changing security environment, India cannot depend on others to defend her. We have to develop our own indigenous capabilities. Agni is a symbol of that resurgent India, which is able to say: "Yes, we will stand on our own feet."

As was the case with the nuclear tests at Pokhran in May last year, the test-firing of Agni Missile is also a purely defensive step. It is not meant for aggression against any nation. Rather, Agni is proof of our determination to strengthen our national security so comprehensively that we can defend ourselves. I have said earlier, and I reiterate, that India remains committed to minimum deterrence, to no-first-use of nuclear weapons, and never to use them against non-nuclear weapon states.

In a statement I had made on December 15, 1998, I had informed Parliament that an advanced version of Agni was under development. I had also announced that its flight-testing would be conducted fully in accordance with established

Address to the nation on the test-firing of Agni 2, New Delhi, 11 April 1999

international practices. Today's test is part of this announced programme of integrated missile development.

In order to reinforce the climate of confidence in the world about India's defensive security programme, my Government had in advance informed the Government of Pakistan, along with major powers, on the 9th of this month of our decision to test-launch Agni 2.

India wants peace in her neighbourhood and peace in the world. And we shall continue to strive for this noble goal. My recent bus journey to Pakistan is an earnest attempt to open a new chapter of peace and cooperation in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

Dear countrymen, ever since you elected my Government in March last year, I have been working with one single aim, with one single purpose: to make India strong and self-confident in every sphere of development and defence. We have worked with sincerity and determination. Against all the odds created by global recession and sanctions imposed by some countries after Pokhran, we have put the Indian economy back on the growth path.

Our *kisans* produced a record output of food grains last year. For the first time since Independence, it has crossed the 200 million tonnes mark. We have given a major impetus to the implementation of programmes for rural development and poverty alleviation.

Industrial production is also picking up, owing to the dedicated work of our *mazdoors*, managers, and entrepreneurs. Bottlenecks in the rapid development of infrastructure are being removed, even as we have launched new and ambitious projects with high employment potential.

India is making impressive strides in new areas of science and technology. The recent launch of INSAT 2-E satellite has taken India into a new orbit of world-class satellite communication. Our success stories in Information Technology

have put the country on the path to becoming a Software Superpower.

India is on the move. And no one can hinder our progress if we remain unwavering and determined. The need of the hour is: Unity and Stability.

As we approach Baisakhi, and celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa, let us take into our hearts, the prayer of the great Guru Govind Singhji.

*Deh Siva var mohe ihe
Subh karman te kubhun na taron.
Na daron urison jab jaye laron,
Nische kar apni jeet karon.*

O God of Power, bless me
That nothing deters me from doing good deeds.
And when I'm obliged to fight,
I fight for sure to win.

Let us make this prayer our resolve.

Come, let us together make the 21st century, India's century.

Triumph of India's Indigenous Warship Development

I AM VERY pleased to be here with all of you today on the auspicious occasion of the commissioning of INS Mysore. The induction of this second guided missile destroyer is indeed a

Speech while commissioning INS Mysore, Mumbai, 2 June 1999

momentous event in the history of the Indian Navy.

It is especially a proud moment for all Indians as this sophisticated warship has been designed in India and built in our own shipyard at Mumbai. This ship's name, too, has a proud association. The State of Mysore, which was later renamed as Karnataka, produced many valiant warriors who fought against foreign rule.

More than forty years ago, the largest cruiser in Asia was commissioned as INS Mysore. That ship served the Navy and the country for many years with dedication and distinction. Today, I am confident that the name of its successor ship will once again resonate across the seas.

This ship marks the triumph of India's indigenous warship design and construction capacity, for which I compliment its builders, Mazgaon Dock Limited. With a mighty array of weapons, sensors, engines, and, of course, well-trained people



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee inspecting the guard of honour on the occasion of commissioning of INS Mysore, Mumbai, 2 June 1999

to man them, this ship will substantially add to our naval strength, and to our ability to defend ourselves.

The Indian Navy has for several years followed the difficult route of indigenization. INS Mysore signifies an important milestone in our advance towards self-reliance. We are confident that the day is not far when the entire fleet of the Indian Navy would comprise warships and submarines designed by the Indian Navy and built by Indian shipyards.

I am happy to announce that we have sanctioned the construction of three of the next-generation world-class Type 17 frigates, two Project 75 submarines, and an aircraft carrier. All of these have been designed by the Indian Navy and will be built in our shipyards.

I am confident that these new ships will be built sooner than the time it took to build INS Mysore. I assure the Naval dockyards that the Government will brook no more delays in warship production and that orders will be timely placed.

Two months ago, I had an opportunity to visit our Western Fleet and to witness naval exercises in the Arabian sea aboard INS Virat. There, I had remarked that the nation—and I—sleep soundly knowing that our seas are well guarded by you sailors. Today, your compatriots in the other two services are fighting courageously in the coldest and highest battlefield in the Kargil sector, so that all of us are reassured that our country's borders are safe and secure.

Standing aboard this warship, I, on behalf of all my countrymen, express my sincerest gratitude today to our brave jawans and officers who are fighting an external aggression in Kashmir. Several of them have laid down their lives in defence of our Motherland. No words are sufficient to convey our eternal gratefulness to these martyrs.

The territorial integrity of India is sacred to us. It is dearer

to us than our lives. The entire nation stands united behind our armed forces in their operations to remove the aggressors.

The situation in Kashmir once again reminds us of the age-old adage: "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." I call upon the officers and men of the Indian Navy to be always alert, and always ready to deal with any situation that may arise in the vast seas and oceans that surround us. The Navy, I know, is called the "Silent Service", but, if called upon to defend the nation, I have no doubt that it too will do its duty with the same dedication as our soldiers and airmen.

India has been a maritime nation since the dawn of our civilization. Our ancestors had mastered the art and science of sailing. And they sailed far and wide to promote trade, culture, knowledge, and the message of peace and brotherhood. As we stand on the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, we must dream of regaining—and surpassing—our old glory on the seas.

India has vast and diverse maritime interests. We need a strong and versatile Navy to safeguard our interests. We are prepared to cooperate with all the maritime countries in the world to ensure peaceful seas everywhere, and especially to keep the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace.

I wish all success to the men, and, in the future, probably women too, who will serve aboard INS Mysore. May all your actions always add to the honour of the Navy and the safety of the country.

The Line of Control Cannot be Altered

I WELCOME YOU to this meeting, which we have called in order to discuss the situation arising out of the Pakistani violation of the Line of Control in the Kargil sector. The consensus within the country on the need to defeat Pakistan's plans has been very welcome and our discussions today will further strengthen our national resolve. I will make my presentation in three parts. Firstly, I shall say something about the military aspects. Secondly, I will touch upon the international diplomatic aspects, and lastly I shall say a few words about India-Pakistan relations.

The recent military action should be seen as part of a continuing pattern of Pakistani involvement in Jammu and Kashmir since 1989. One phase of the involvement reached its peak in the early part of 1990, but this was contained soon after. The second phase started in 1992, when Pakistan began to move in its own people in the form of different terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Toiba or the Harkat-ul-Ansar. This phase reached its peak in the period from 1993 to 1995 and was focussed in the Valley. Once India succeeded in containing this, the action moved to other parts of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in selected districts of Jammu and in the regions adjoining the Line of Control.

The current action represents a qualitatively new move. This time, the numbers are higher than the usual infiltration size. What is also new is that this time they are holding territory rather than seeking to infiltrate into the valley or other parts of Jammu and Kashmir. This action poses the danger of interdicting our lines of communication both to Leh and to Siachen. This is also the first time that Pakistan is

Speech at the All Party Meeting on Kargil, New Delhi, 28 June 1999

holding out a military challenge to the Shimla Agreement by seeking to alter the LoC. They were also hoping that by escalating the ground situation, they would succeed either in forcing international attention on the issue, or they would compel us to accept the altered status quo. Pakistan miscalculated in this and we have made it clear that we shall not countenance the alteration of the LoC and that we shall categorically reject any attempt to question the LoC.

All in all, it was a challenge to our national resolve and we had no option but to undertake stepped-up operations to evict them. The terrain gave them significant military advantage, since they were entrenched along the ridges in a 140-kilometre stretch, from Mushkoh valley and Drass in the West to Batalik and Turtok in the East. The initial ground action was, therefore, slow and costly in casualties. This was why we decided to bring in air power to pound the armed intruders. We are satisfied with the progress made so far. I am sure all of you



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee with the Chief of Army Staff, General V.P. Malik, Kargil, 13 June 1999

will join me in applauding the performance of our armed forces who have already brought us significant successes. The military threat of interdiction of the road to Leh has been contained. Several extremely difficult features such as Point 5140 and Tololing have already been re-taken and we have no doubt that our combined air and ground operations will evict all the intruders. We express our sincere gratitude to our armed forces and salute the brave men who have laid down their lives. Our gratitude must also ensure that the families that have been bereaved will be looked after by the nation as a labour of love and a mark of respect for the men who have made the supreme sacrifice.

I would also like to make a few brief points on our approach to a resolution of the situation. We are determined that the military action will not be stopped or scaled back until the intruders have been driven away. We agreed to receive the Pakistan foreign minister to allow Pakistan one chance to explain its position. We wanted to hear from them their willingness to withdraw the intruders, without conditions and in a specified time. This we did not hear. We are clear that there will be no further dialogue so long as the incursion continues. We are making no secret deals and no proposals or mediation by third countries will be accepted. In short, nothing but the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the intruders will satisfy our requirements.

The reactions from the international community so far have been quite satisfactory. Among the permanent members of the Security Council, Russia has extended unequivocal support and has stated that we are fully justified in the action that we are taking. The USA has also unequivocally held Pakistan responsible for the current incursion. They also sent an emissary, Gen. Zinni, the Commander-in-Chief of the Central Command, who has talked to the Pakistani Prime Minister and the Army Chief asking for the withdrawal of the intruders from the Kargil sector. We have been briefed on Gen. Zinni's

discussions in Islamabad by a representative of the State Department. We are all familiar with the G-8 communique, which also unequivocally called for a reversal of the intrusion across the Line of Control. All of these countries have also recognized the restraint, which we have exercised so far. They have also recognized the responsible approach we have adopted, which consists of localizing the operations while pushing back the intruders, and also conveying our readiness to resume the Lahore process if Pakistan were to withdraw the intruders. In doing so and in engaging the international community more actively than we have done in the past, we have achieved satisfactory results in the form of the various statements and positions of the members of the international community.

With regard to Pakistan, there is continued consensus in India on seeking to improve relations with that country, once intruders are withdrawn. We shall do this in good faith, but without any illusions. We will also seek a formal re-affirmation of the inviolability of LoC as it emerged after the Shimla Agreement, and which both countries have formally delineated on the map. We have a structured dialogue at the foreign secretary level and there are proposals for contacts at the expert level to discuss issues arising out of the Lahore process. Our position is that we want to continue this dialogue but under no conditions will we permit any alteration in the status quo along the LoC.

I will now request the Service Chiefs to brief this meeting on the current situation in the Kargil sector. After they have finished their briefings, they will take leave of you and we shall continue our discussions.

Country's Firm Support— Morale Booster for Jawans

OUR BRAVE SOLDIERS are performing their duties on the battle-front and while doing so, they risk their lives and are injured also. Though the Government takes a number of welfare measures for the families of martyrs and also for the jawans, who during the course of their duty, are disabled and lose their limbs, but the public too has a duty towards them.

The country is infused with patriotic fervour. People are coming forward for donating their blood. Money in the form of donations is pouring in. Many organizations are engaged in this work. This activity needs to be further enhanced. It is not important what the amount is but what matters is the sublime spirit behind the donations. But this does not mean we donate smaller amount, and claim the spirit behind these to be higher. I have stressed on spirit because intensity of emotions is very important. If spirit is very intense, then the donations are bound to be large. Such crisis do not occur frequently and nobody wants their recurrence. But, since the crisis is there, we all pray that the country comes out of it unscathed. Let the jawans perform their duties on the front but we are all behind the battleline. The jawans fight on the border, but the entire country stands firmly behind them, and with direct support from the whole nation, the situation changes, and the morale of the jawans also gets a boost. We have provided telephones for jawans fighting on border. Now they can talk to their families from the battle-field, but problems in the country too reach the battle front via this channel. Our jawans, however, expect that peace and tranquility prevail in the country and that each one of us performs his duty. And this spirit has been demonstrated by your coming here and contributing to the Fund.

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi to the people gathered at his residence, New Delhi, 28 June 1999

Victory of Tiger Hills

OUR VALIANT JAWANS and officers are fighting with the enemy on battle-front and laying down their lives while performing their duty towards their Motherland. Fierce battles are fought on the battle-fronts. Hand to hand fights take place. Our jawans have fought bravely against the enemy and pushed him back and emerged victorious. The invaders had taken firm positions on Tiger Hill top. They were on a height and were able to keep a watch on our movement. They were in an advantageous position, but the strategy adopted by the Army forced the enemy to flee from Tiger Hills. A large number of dead bodies of the enemy lay scattered. We, too had to bear loss, but our loss was comparatively very small.

These days battle scenes can be viewed on the television. There is transparency. It is good in a sense that our people should be familiar with the circumstances under which our jawans are fighting, making sacrifices and securing victories. When jawans are performing their duties on the front, we, the countrymen, too have a duty to contribute our mite to the cause.

Today, you came here and donated money for the Defence Fund. We are very thankful to you. But these donations must continue. We will have to continue these donations till the war is on. In fact, we want this war to end at the earliest and with this aim our jawans are fighting with their full might. People too are extending whole-hearted support. The whole country is engulfed in a frenzy of enthusiasm. All the countrymen, irrespective of their caste, creed or religion are making contributions in this national ritual. This is the strength of our jawans, which has led them to victories one after another. I express my gratitude and hope that your cooperation and support will continue.

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi to the people and organizations at his residence, New Delhi, 5 July 1999

Kargil—A Challenge to Our National Resolve

THIS MEETING HAS been called in order to discuss the situation arising out of the Pakistani aggression in Kargil—also the internal security situation as a result of hostile operations by foreign agencies and mercenaries. The consensus within the country, on the need to defeat Pakistan's plans, is heartening. I am sure our discussions today will further strengthen the national resolve. I shall brief this meeting on the military and diplomatic situation first, and then would like to hear from the assembled Chief Ministers about the internal security situation in their States.

We have seen terrorist operations master-minded by Pakistan since the early 1980's. The initial target was Punjab and we all know the consequences of that. The people of Punjab stood up to the challenge unitedly and we were able to defeat the plans of the enemy. I pay tribute also to the police in Punjab, which tackled the situation with grit and determination.

After Punjab, the target has been the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Starting from 1989, extremist groups such as the JKLF, Lashkar-e-Toiba, or the Harkat-ul-Ansar have been infiltrating into the State from Pakistan and committing terrorist acts against innocent people. Our armed forces and the paramilitary had succeeded in containing this challenge also by the mid-1990's. Jammu and Kashmir had returned to normalcy, economic activity was picking up, and tourism was flourishing. In desperation, Pakistan turned to actions such as the large-scale massacre of innocent civilians. About this, too, you are familiar.

Introductory remarks at the Chief Ministers' Conference on National Security, New Delhi, 7 July 1999

Yet again, in desperation Pakistan raised the ante—this time in Kargil. But the current action in Kargil sector represents a qualitatively new move by Pakistan. This time, the numbers are higher, they intruded to hold territory rather than simply to infiltrate. This is also the first time that Pakistan is holding out a military challenge to try and alter the LoC. Pakistan clearly miscalculated, and we have made it explicit that we shall not countenance any alteration of the LoC. We categorically reject any attempt to question the validity of LoC.

This new escalation represented a challenge to our national resolve since it called into question the sanctity of the Shimla Agreement. The three service chiefs are present and you will be briefed in detail on the conduct of operations and the readiness of our armed forces. I am sure you will all join me in paying a tribute to the armed forces for their gallant performance.

The military threat of interdiction of the Srinagar to Leh highway has been eliminated. The capture of important mountain features such as Tololing Top and Tiger Hill demonstrate the bravery and skill of our soldiers. These were extremely difficult operations and I take this opportunity of saluting the brave men who gave their lives for the protection of our security. All too often, unfortunately, our gratitude is short-lived and the sacrifices of our soldiers are forgotten after the campaign. Instances have been reported where promises made in the past to the soldiers or their families have not been kept. I know that several States have announced that they will provide such schemes for the families of those soldiers who have died in this campaign. This is welcome. I appeal to all the Chief Ministers to ensure that there are no delays in implementing these schemes nor should they be allowed to be forgotten.

Our military operations will continue until the last of the intruders has been driven back. There will be no stopping or scaling back until this objective has been achieved. At the same time, we are willing to give diplomacy a chance if that will enable us to achieve our objectives. For this reason, we have

had some contacts with Pakistan in recent weeks. The objective is one and only one. It is the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the intruders from our side of the Line of Control. There is no other objective and no other subject that we are discussing.

We have also been in close touch with the international community. This is not an internationalization of the Kashmir question, since they all recognize that this is a bilateral matter to be settled between India and Pakistan. We have ourselves made it clear that there is no room for third-party involvement, however well-intentioned. Nevertheless, it was important for us to explain our position.

We have had successes in this regard. Russia has shown understanding and has expressed support for the action that we are taking. The United States has clearly named Pakistan as the country responsible in the incursion. They have actively engaged Pakistan in trying to persuade that country to withdraw the intruders. In pursuit of this, the Commander-in-Chief of the Central Command of the USA, General Zinni visited Pakistan for talks with their military and civilian leaders. More recently, Mr. Nawaz Sharif has been to Washington. We are informed that Pakistan has agreed to withdraw. We will watch for results on the ground. In the meantime, our operations shall continue unabated.

A little earlier, the G-8 countries had clearly recognized that the intrusion across the LoC was an irresponsible act and had called for the withdrawal of the intruders. All this points to the success of our diplomacy and the correctness of our decision to engage the outside world more.

However, I wish to stress that no outsider owes it to us to reverse the present incursion. We alone are responsible for safeguarding our security and protecting our interests. While we are grateful for the support and understanding of the international community, there will be no compromise on our military operations. We have therefore, to continue to rely on

our armed forces to deal with this and other challenges that are bound to come up. This obliges us to look to our defence preparedness in the future. In the 1980's, our defence spending was of the order of 3.5 per cent of our GDP. This fell below 2.5 per cent in the 1990's, which is among the lowest in the world. My Government raised the defence budget last year shortly after taking over. We must be realistic and recognize that our security requirements need to be met and that we are confronting an enemy who is resolute and unwilling to see reason. We have to be clear that if we will the end, we must also will the means. I believe the national consensus is changing in the light of our current experience and I hope we can tap the national mood in order to ensure that such situations do not recur in future.

Similarly, we need to guard against internal threats. Our foe is bent upon sowing terrorism and disaffection throughout the country. We are an open democratic society, and are determined to preserve our freedom. However, the system does permit unscrupulous elements to exploit it, and to spread terror through killing innocent people. We must therefore, increase our counter-terrorism capabilities and our vigilance. This is a long-term challenge and we have lived with it for close to two decades already. It is time to take resolute measures and to deal firmly with a situation, which is threatening to escalate. I have been moved by the plight of the families of the innocent victims who have been massacred by cowardly night-attacks or bombs that have been set off in various cities.

Our States must cooperate more closely in order to deal with this threat. This applies with special force to States that lie along the international border. Attempts are being made by the enemy and will continue to be made to aggravate the communal situation. We must be on our guard against this. While this requires efficient and impartial administration in the short-term, the long-term remedy is to bring to all sections of society the benefits of development without any discrimination. I look forward to hearing from the Chief Ministers their views and proposals for improving our internal security arrangements.

Some concern has been expressed in the country that the Government will accept mediation or internationalization. I tell you categorically that this will not happen. If in our interaction with the international community we are told that Pakistan has violated the Line of Control, that it must withdraw the armed intruders from the Indian side of the LoC, that the sanctity of the LoC must be restored, that the Lahore process must be reinitiated, and we express our satisfaction with this objective reaction of the international community, it does not mean that we are seeking mediation or agreeing to internationalization. All it means is that while our armed forces are doing everything to throw out the armed intruders, we are also engaged diplomatically to achieve the same purpose.

I will now request the service chiefs to brief this meeting on the current situation in the Kargil sector. After they have finished their briefings, they will take leave of you and we shall continue our discussions. In that, I request the Chief Ministers to limit their intervention to not more than ten minutes each.

Beat Back the Enemy: The Determination of 100 Crore People

WE HAVE HAD a very focussed and fruitful discussion on the Kargil situation. Also, on some of the issues relating to internal security in our country.

As many as 28 Chief Ministers, administrators, and

Concluding remarks at the Chief Ministers' Conference, New Delhi, 7 July 1999

representatives from three union territories, took part in the meeting. I have profited greatly from it and would like to thank all of you for sparing the time to come here and share your perspectives with us.

It is clear from our discussions that the country stands united on the need to repulse the enemy across the Line of Control. Today, we have spoken in one voice.

In spite of the many political differences, the participants in today's conference have once again upheld the principle of giving primacy to national security over everything else. Today only one determination dwells in the hundred crore hearts in India—the determination to beat back the enemy's armed aggression.

This unity is our strength. The conference of the chief ministers has reflected our unity and hence our strength. It boosts the morale and the fighting spirit of our jawans on the borders like nothing else does.

I, therefore, congratulate the chief ministers and governments of all the States for their unflinching support to the armed forces and to the Union Government in this hour of trial.

I have also been reassured by the consensus, which has been reflected in the discussions today, on the need for us to do everything possible for the families of the soldiers and airmen who have lost their lives in the current operation.

I have been touched by the spontaneous expressions of support that I have seen throughout the country from all sections of society, all of them wanting to do their bit for the brave men who are fighting to safeguard our nation's security. I am sure this must have been your experience, too.

Soon after the Kargil action started, voluntary contributions to the National Defence Fund and other funds operated by the Defence Headquarters have started pouring in—both from the

country and from abroad. A meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Defence Fund was held yesterday. Several major decisions were taken at the meeting.

A very good suggestion has been made in today's conference on constituting a committee to evolve a National Policy on welfare of our jawans and ex-servicemen on a permanent and institutionalized basis. I am happy to announce the constitution of such a committee comprising the following members:

● Shri George Fernandes,	Minister of Defence
● Shri Yashwant Sinha	Minister of Finance
● Shri Jyoti Basu	Chief Minister of West Bengal
● Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu	Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh
● Shrimati Shiela Dixit	Chief Minister of Delhi
● Dr. Farooq Abdullah	Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir
● Shri Prakash Singh Badal	Chief Minister of Punjab
● Prof. Premkumar Dhumal	Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh.

Another welcome suggestion has been made for the erection of a fitting national martyrs memorial to all the soldiers who have laid down their lives in defence of the Motherland in all the wars since 1947. Your acclaim implies its acceptance. The Government, in consultation with all the political parties and State Governments, will soon take appropriate action in the matter.

I have also noted the support that has been expressed today for our diplomatic efforts. These are not intended in any way to blunt the cutting edge of our military, but are a supplement to those efforts. Today's conference has demonstrated the complete consensus amongst us that there shall be no internationalization of the Kashmir question.

Some participants have referred to the joint statement

issued by the US president Mr. Bill Clinton and the Pakistani Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif. This is a welcome development. I would, however, like to assure you that it does not create any scope for third-party mediation in the Kashmir issue. India is firmly committed to the principle of bilateralism in resolving this issue and there will be no deviation whatsoever from it. Indeed, the United States itself has stated that the issue should be resolved in a bilateral framework.

At today's conference, we have also discussed in fairly concrete terms the internal security situation. We all recognize the need to raise our vigilance in this matter and I am sure that the Home Ministry and the various security agencies will be equal to the challenge. Corruption at the ground level is the root of many of our troubles in this regard and we must combat this particular evil with greater resoluteness than we have done so far.

Some Members have made the suggestion for a Rajya Sabha session to discuss Kargil, and also the presentation of a White Paper on the subject. This suggestion was also made at the recent all-party meeting. At both meetings, the discussions have revealed a sharp division of opinion. I shall however, continue to evolve a consensus on the matter by examining the proposal afresh. We have already had two all-party meetings. We will convene more meetings of the leaders of all political parties as and when necessary. Another meeting of the Chief Ministers can be called.

Once again, I thank you all for sparing your time and for sharing your views and analysis with me.

Face Challenges Unitedly

THANK YOU FOR collecting funds for the Jawans who have sacrificed their lives in Kargil or got injured. Thanks also for the promise of future collection of funds. This time, we want to evolve a system so that there is no difficulty for members of the martyr's family. There are various schemes which would be implemented thoroughly. I want to assure you in this regard. Now, we are taking special care of the injured too. It has happened sometimes that the disabled were forgotten after providing them some initial assistance. We are determined not to let such a thing happen this time. The manufacturing of artificial limbs is being quickened in the country. If there is a case where a jawan has to be sent abroad for treatment, the Government will bear all the expenses in this regard and will ensure that he spends rest of his life with grace and respect.

The war is heading towards the end. We are fast moving towards victory. The martyrdom will inspire us to victory. The neighbour occupied our territory—why was it done? It is still not clear. They say they have done that to attract, world's attention towards Kashmir. India already abides by the Shimla Agreement which provides for discussion on Kashmir. Discussions are also on. But how discussions can continue when guns spew fire? So, we have shut the mouth of the gun. They are going away on their own—it is a good thing. Otherwise, we are prepared to show them the way to return. Entire credit for the victory goes to our soldiers. If you get time, go there. Unless you go there and see the terrain there, you will not be able to realize how much work has been done by them, how difficult the task was and how successfully it has been done.

We have to be on guard. We want peace and our journey

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi to the members of Rotary Club at his residence, New Delhi, 15 July 1999

to Lahore showed that we are trying for peace. But neither peace nor war can be one-sided. We have told that we want peace but if the reply to peace offer is not positive we also know how to fight back. We hope there will be further improvement in the situation. The whole country stood as one-man during the crisis and that is India's greatest strength. India drives power from that source. We forgot all our differences. Every segment got a new awakening. Everywhere in the country, there was a new enthusiasm. Even the young children, who have saved money in their piggy banks, bring it and offer it, saying that these are for jawans. This is to ensure success in the war. In a country where the soldiers are ready to sacrifice their lives, where children are ready to donate their small savings for the war fund, there is nothing to worry about. The country will definitely win.

Jawans' Sacrifices will Always be Remembered

THE ENTIRE COUNTRY is paying homage to the soldiers who laid down their lives in the Kargil war. We also have empathy towards those brave soldiers who got injured on the field. We are doing our best to ensure that the families of the martyrs in the war should not have any problem. Due care will be taken for the injured jawans. We have got complaints that as long as the war continues, there is concern for jawans and they are remembered. Once the war is over, the jawans are forgotten. Brothers and sisters, this will not be allowed this time. We have prepared comprehensive plans to help the jawans who made supreme sacrifices for the country. If we cannot take care of

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi to DAV students' rally, New Delhi, 31 July 1999

them for the rest of their lives, then we will not be considered committed to our Motherland.

The whole country has awakened during the war. The presence of all of you in such a massive number, collection of one crore eleven lakh rupees through small contributions indicates and proves that the country is grateful to its brave soldiers and will fulfil its obligation. Young children have given money from their piggy banks, youth are ready to donate their blood. People have already contributed Rs. 300 crore towards the National Defence Fund. Besides, there are many more funds. The high spirit of the country, and enthusiasm are clear pointers that though we want peace yet we will give a strong rebuff to the invasion and ensure the wiping out of invaders from our territory.

Kargil has been vacated but the firing is still on. The firing should also end. We want to have good relations with neighbours but such a thing cannot be one-sided. I took a message of friendship to Lahore but in return, we got enmity. Our confidence was shattered. For re-establishing good relations, it is necessary to have mutual confidence. The terrorist activities are going on throughout the country. These activities are more in Jammu and Kashmir—innocent citizens are being killed. Even the women and children are not being spared. Is this the way of establishing good relations? This is not the way of opening the door for negotiations. We have clarified India's policy and hope that due consideration is given to it by our neighbour. We will protect our independence, and integrity at any cost. Our jawans have shown the way with their scarifices. The whole country stands united behind the jawans.

Perhaps, there is no parallel to the war that was witnessed in the battlefield of Kargil. The jawans were, vying with one another to sacrifice their lives, there was indomitable urge to defeat the enemy. Tall mountains, the difficulty to access than, with invaders perched on the top and our soldiers were trying to reach the peaks from the lower grounds. They gave their lives but captured the peaks, unfurled the tricolour. Our soldiers

upheld the glory of the tricolour. We will also have to resolve that we will not let down our national flag.

I thank the DAV educational institutions for organizing such a magnificent programme. I have been attached to Arya Samaj since my childhood. I learnt my first lessons of patriotism from Arya Samaj and Arya Samaj Sabha. Educational institutions related to Arya Samaj made substantial contribution to the freedom struggle. After independence, the role played by educational institutions of Arya Samaj in educational reforms, and protection of culture has really been commendable. I wish that these educational institutions grow and prosper for all times. It is evident that you will support the country at the time of crisis but it should be our endeavour—you and me and everyone that such crisis does not reccur. Our enemies should not get a chance for aggression. I assure you that we will make a sincere effort in this regard and succeed with your cooperation.

Make India a Self-reliant and Secure Nation

I AM INDEED proud and happy to be in your midst during the 24th Conference of DRDO Directors. I would like to congratulate the DRDO award winners for their excellent performance and contribution towards self-reliance in defence technologies. From the award function, I can see intense partnership of multiple institutions.

This conference is taking place at a very important moment in the history of India's national security, perhaps a turning point in our destiny as a free nation. DRDO is working on a

Address at the 24th Conference of DRDO Directors, New Delhi, 6 August 1999

spectrum of disciplines ranging from missiles, electronics, aircraft, tanks, armaments, ship-related technologies, to life support systems. The indigenously developed systems are making me confident about the guaranteed technological support available from our laboratories to the armed forces. In addition, technology needed for mountain warfare is to be given the highest priority by DRDO.

In 1998, India became a nuclear weapon state. The partnership of DRDO and the Department of Atomic Energy has made this mission possible. It was indeed an impressive performance. In April 1999 AGNI missile system was operationalized. These two events have historical, technological, and strategic significance, thereby making the country self-reliant in the strategic sector. I would like to congratulate the DRDO directors, scientists, technologists, technicians, and their partners for this accomplishment.

DRDO's spectrum of technology are varied. Some of them are highly strategic in nature. I recognize the pioneering work being done by the team members who are involved in this. They have to work in very difficult conditions. I would like to tell the directors that the nation acknowledges the teams' hard work and is grateful to them.

Information Technology heralds the dawn of a new era to change the quality of life for humans. Conscious of this emerging facet, a Task Force on IT was constituted and the recommendations were far-reaching. The implementation of these recommendations would lead to industrial progress as well as generating wealth for the nation. It is here the DRDO has a leading role to play in generating technologies and secured systems. In this direction, DRDO has taken the initiative to start a Centre for Information Sciences, with academy partnership.

It is heartening to know that the development of critical components and devices that have come out of our own

foundries is the backbone to the state-of-the-art electronic systems. The availability of these devices have ensured that our efforts in realizing complex systems have not been jeopardized by the technology denials and control regimes enforced by the developed world. DRDO's culture of intense partnership with R&D establishments, academic institutions, and industries has enabled to overcome this problem.

You have proved that in spite of the denials the nation is competent to develop and demonstrate to the world our capabilities to produce high-tech systems, comparable to the international standards. Such actions will provide strength to our political system to conduct an independent foreign policy, derived from the ability of the nation to underpin self-reliance in defence systems.

We should bear in mind that nation's prosperity and security and all-round well-being of its citizens, depends crucially on its indigenous strength in science and technology. Science is a beautiful gift to the humanity. Some countries have joined together and proclaimed technology denials for various political and commercial reasons. In the name of dual-use technology, there are many technologies denied to our civilian sector industries. It is indeed a challenge for the science and technology community of India.

A national movement with consortium of laboratory, academy, and industry should meet such challenges in a time bound manner. You can spearhead this movement to make India a self-reliant and secure nation.

Tributes to War Heroes

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to release this special set of five postage stamps commemorating the Gallantry Award Winners of the Indian Armed Forces.

We are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of our Republic. It is only appropriate that on this occasion we should recall with deep gratitude the supreme sacrifices made by our armed forces—sacrifices to which the nation pays its humble tribute through the Gallantry Awards.

Our epics and ancient texts refer to honouring warriors who display outstanding valor on the battlefield. Indeed, memorials to soldiers and their bravery form an integral part of our rich archaeological heritage. In his seminal work, *Arthashastra*, Kautilya has given an elaborate account of gallantry awards for various acts of bravery.

Friends, with the dawn of independence in 1947, the Armed Forces of free India had an entirely different role to play—with new goals to spur them on and new aspirations to fulfil. On our armed forces fell the mantle of defending our sacred motherland from external aggression.

Within two months of independence, our armed forces were called upon to evict Pakistani invaders from Jammu and Kashmir. They took up the challenge and displayed remarkable courage in repelling the Pakistani forces.

In recognition of the supreme sacrifices made by the armed forces in Jammu and Kashmir and in keeping with our tradition of honouring the brave, the Government of India instituted the gallantry awards on January 26, 1950. Therefore, today we also celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Gallantry Awards, the highest of which is the Param Vir Chakra.

Speech while releasing five postage stamps commemorating the Gallantry Award Winners, New Delhi, 28 January 2000

The President of India gives these awards for the most outstanding acts of bravery and valor or self-sacrifice by our soldiers while defending our motherland from her enemies. The awards symbolize a grateful nation's tribute to the brave and the fearless.

Ever since the Indian Army and Air Force were called upon to repel Pakistani raiders from Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, our armed forces have successfully met several challenges to India's unity and integrity.

In 1962, during the Chinese aggression, our armed forces fought valiantly from Ladakh in the west to NEFA in the east. The hostile terrain and treacherous weather did not deter them. Pilots of the IAF heroically rose to the occasion, airlifting supplies and ammunition to forward positions in uncharted hilly area and in adverse weather conditions, with virtually no ground support.

In 1965, our armed forces were again called upon to defend India's frontiers, this time from Pakistan's aggression in the west. The Pakistani attack started in Kutch and soon spread to Jammu and Kashmir. In the ensuing war that lasted 25 days, the Indian Army emerged victorious. In this war, too, the IAF helped checkmating the enemy, especially in the Chhamb sector.

In 1971, India faced a new challenge. More than ten million refugees poured across the eastern border into India, fleeing the repression of the Pakistani Army in what was then East Pakistan but would soon emerge as Bangladesh.

The tension along India's borders erupted in a pre-meditated attack by Pakistan. Our armed forces swung into action and swiftly defeated the aggressor. In meeting the external aggression of 1971, all three wings of the armed forces acted in unison.

The fledgling Indian Navy which we had inherited from the British in 1947, had by 1971 grown into an awesome fleet that not only protected the integrity of our long coastline but

also carried out daring attacks on the enemy's harbors. Thanks to the excellent co-ordination between the three services, the aggression was quickly repulsed and Pakistan had to surrender to the Indian forces.

Last summer, our brave soldiers fought Pakistani intruders in the Kargil sector, unmindful of the extremely hostile terrain. Inch by inch, peak by peak, they recovered India's sacred land and drove out the intruders, suffering casualties. Their magnificent heroism charged the entire nation. Pilots of the Indian Air Force played a significant role in Kargil, flying in treacherous conditions but with deadly impact on the intruders.

Stories of bravery from the Kargil front have now become household tales of inspiration for children. By defeating the enemy in Kargil, our armed forces have set new standards of valor on the battlefield and devotion to duty. Today, let us remember those who gave their lives so that we may live.

Friends, countries all over the world use postage stamps to communicate messages of significance to the people and to honour outstanding personalities. Stamps mark significant milestones in the history of a nation.

The set of five unique stamps being issued today to honour the gallantry award winners for their exemplary acts of courage will carry an inspiring message to people all over the country, especially young children. This set of stamps also marks an important milestone in the history of independent India.

The choice of heroes to be commemorated on the stamps was extremely difficult for the Armed Forces Headquarters. But then, these five stamps are symbolic of the nation's tribute to all the brave heroes of the Indian armed forces. After all, no award can match their valour and sacrifice.

I wish to conclude by quoting from a touching letter sent by a thirteen-year-old girl in honour of soldiers involved in the Kargil conflict:

"No award, no matter how big, is worthy of those brave men who fought for their motherland on the icy peaks of Kargil. I salute those selfless and dedicated men who lost their lives in order for us to live happily in a safe environment. We owe them our lives and independence, it is a debt that can never be paid off."

We can only remember our heroes. And that is the best tribute we can pay to their heroic deeds. This set of commemorative stamps will serve to keep alive memories of the brave men of our Armed Forces.

It has been a privilege for me to release these stamps and honour all winners of gallantry awards ever since they were instituted fifty years ago.

Meet Challenges with Fortitude

I HAVE RECEIVED the amount collected through the efforts of the Hind Samachar Group. What is substantial has been achieved, the rest is not of much consequence. Those who had to speak have already spoken. I have only to offer thanks.

I had attended your last function as well. In fact, the work done by the Hind Samachar Group of Newspapers has no parallel. Funds have been raised for all martyrs including those of Kargil and the victims of super cyclone in Orissa and in some other parts of the country as well. I compliment Vijayji for his massive and sincere efforts. I am also grateful to those who have donated money for the cause. One has heard that

every drop counts in filling the sea. But collection of small funds could add up to such a huge sum indicates not only the sincerity of your drive but also the popularity of your newspapers. During war the jawans fight in the field and on mountain tops and prove their might braving the death. They make their supreme sacrifice but how should common citizens make their contribution is a matter of consideration. By the way, it is not the forces alone, which fight in a war but the whole country. But what should the common citizens directly related with war do? They can make monetary contributions—not only once but again and again and can perform duties related to the war. It should be realized that a common citizen is actively cooperating and he should also have solace that he is also making his own contributions.

The war in Kargil was really unique; we have not seen such a war earlier. You cannot imagine the locale of the battle without seeing it. This time the battle came right inside our homes and drawing rooms, courtesy television. Hence, the war was not fought in camera. But yes, how the Pakistanis ran away for their lives leaving the corpses of their fallen soldiers and how our brave soldiers collected their dead bodies and performed their last rites came into the limelight.

The media had free access to the theatre of war. The newspapers could write at length. They could see the gallant actions of our soldiers and point out their shortcomings with focused attention. But Pakistan had no such confidence. They thought they would sneak into our territory by crossing the borderline and stay put at some distance there. India would protest. Pakistanis thought that an impression would be created across the world that tension has developed between India and Pakistan. That a flash point was about to come, how could the world remain a silent spectator. Some people would jump into the fray to arbitrate while they would continue their occupation. Once entrenched on our land, they would succeed in drawing a new line of border.

These were the plans and calculations. But there was only

one shortcoming in their arithmetic—they had under-rated our competence. They had never calculated our deftness. They could not assess our strategic brilliance. They had never expected that we would retaliate so promptly and effectively and we would never stop until the last inch of our territory had been freed from their occupation. Pressure was mounted by some countries that Pakistan was ready for a ceasefire provided we left some of our territory under its occupation and the issue will be resolved through mutual talks. Their point was: why fight after all for territory, which is desolate, and without any population. Hence stop the war. We said this would never happen. The war would continue until every inch of our land had been vacated by the aggressor. Our Air Force also made its contributions.

The diaries of Pakistani soldiers have been seized. These are on public display. Anybody can see them. It is clear from these diaries that the Pakistanis had no clue at all that we would be pressing our Air Force in the operations. They were proved wrong. We deployed our Air Force in the battle. It effectively helped our Army. Had we wished we would have gone into Pakistan by crossing the border line. Now you would ask why did we not go in? We had firmly decided against it. Why it was decided, I do not want to go into it. What Farooq Sahib and Chamanlalji have said is not being fulfilled? But I also do not want to go into that question.

But after the Kargil victory when the correspondents asked me whether the war had ended, I said the war had ended no doubt but the battle will go on. The battle will continue as long as Pakistan does not give up its intention to grab Kashmir. They are also paying the price. It is not, as if we are happy about it. After all I went to Lahore. No one had ever thought I could go to Lahore. The advantage of my Lahore journey was that everyone came to know about Pakistan's intentions and the entire world got the impression that while India wants peace, Pakistan does not.

Our jawans proved their worth through their devastating response to the enemy. We had fewer casualties than what they had. This is also no longer a secret. Therefore, the other side is embittered. Their rout in Bangladesh was all along pinching them. Now the defeat in Kargil is pricking like a thorn in their heart. But Kargil was ours, it is ours and would remain with us forever. There is no need to repeat this. But instead of extending their hand in response to our gesture of goodwill and friendship, Pakistan attacked us. Pakistan betrayed us. And this is why we insist that before any talks let that confidence be restored which existed before my Lahore visit but which was broken by Pakistan. And the foreign powers also agreed on this for their own reasons. But we have to make our move in keeping with our own interests. We have to formulate our strategy according to our preparedness.

Pakistan had wanted to make Kashmir an international issue. But it has not succeeded so far. Possibly it might intensify its activities shortly. Kashmir is not an issue today. Now it is terrorism that has become an issue and Pakistan is standing like a criminal in the dock before the world. We are defying terrorism and mobilizing all the world opinion to unite in opposing it. We are also making our own preparations. At that time, we had to face a sudden attack. But this time we faced no difficulty in facing the sudden onslaught. Now we are ready in fact, fully prepared. It is time that one or two salvos can be fired and that could explode and might hurt someone. That can wound a person and can even be fatal. The salvos fired by us can also cause damage. It is a different matter that the news of our firing gets published in Pakistani newspapers. The salvos fired at us from across the border get noticed in our newspapers. Our people read newspapers published from this side and wonder aloud: Oh! they have fired once again. This will continue. But we cannot lose heart. This war has continued for fifty years now but this should not deflect us. We should not feel unhappy to think we have been fighting for fifty years. How long will we continue to fight ? The fight will go on as

long as we are alive and we will fight so long as we do not win. How can we have Kashmir? We try to convince even the foreigners but they have no reply. The people of Jammu and Kashmir had merged with India of their own free will. We only wanted to give them opportunities. We will have to repeat this story to the world once again. New facts will again have to be placed before the world. From the very beginning Pakistan has been trying to grab Kashmir in a perfidious manner. Surreptitiously. Sometimes it is the tribals' invasion and at times it is the people from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. But every time they have to bring their army and throw them in the battle but without success.

Now it is being said on behalf of Pakistan that they have no demand or dispute with India. They only want to talk on Kashmir. Talks on Kashmir have been held over the last fifty years. What more do you want to talk? We are also willing to talk on Kashmir. But remember when there is a talk on Kashmir it would centre round regarding the one third of Kashmir that is under Pakistan's occupation. You would have to give it up. It is a part of India. Jammu and Kashmir as a whole is a single entity but we will not accept the logic that the state has an overwhelming population of Muslims. This logic will not be acceptable. The number of Muslims in India is perhaps much more than in Pakistan. India belongs to all.

We are a country of mixed population. No partition of this country will be allowed a second time. I had told this to Nawaz Shariff when we talked in Lahore. During the official level talks an aide of Nawaz Shariff said that Kashmir should have gone to Pakistan at the time of partition itself. We asked when did the partition take place on the basis of Hindus—Muslims? I said we did not accept partition on the basis of Hindus-Muslims and that Muslims in India live everywhere. Their number is more in Jammu and Kashmir and they decided to live in and with India of their own free will. Whenever there will be an extensive discussion, they will be told about it at

length. Many people have forgotten one thing. They talk of referendum. The condition for referendum was that first Pakistan removes its forces and infiltrators and entire Jammu and Kashmir should come back under our control. But Pakistan did not remove its forces and this is why no referendum was held. Afterwards, there were elections in Jammu and Kashmir and anyone can have complaints of rigging against them.

But nobody can have any complaints about high-handedness in the elections held during the Janata Party's regime in 1977. It was accepted both by foreigners and Pakistan alike. In that election no one voted to go to Pakistan. There was not even an indication to this. So far as the question of referendum is concerned, was it held at the time of partition? Were the people asked about their choice? One third of Kashmir is even now under the forcible occupation of Pakistan. Was the choice of the people living there taken into consideration? We want peace. But with our yearning for peace we shall also defend our national integrity and unity. Now Pakistan would not decide anything because of the pressure of world opinion. Threats of a nuclear war are also talked about. But are those issuing such threats understand what they are talking ? They think if they drop a bomb India will be destroyed altogether and they would get recognition. This is not to happen. We have said that we would not be the first country to use nuclear weapons. We will not begin first. But if someone else dare attack us, we will not wait until the moment we are wiped out and say that we kept our word of not being the first to use the weapon. But I wish to tell Pakistan if they really do not want to use nuclear weapons and unleash an atomic war, then they also declare that they will not be the first country to use their nuclear weapons. We have declared, now they should do. Their intentions are different and we are not unaware of them. We are ready to face any consequence. We have to remain united and strong. Taking inspiration from our martyrs we have to march towards victory. After Kargil it is not necessary

to fill one's eyes with tears. After Kargil we need only to rejoice in glory.

Sisters and brothers, I have been informed that 62 persons attached with Dhumalji's chain of newspapers have made their supreme sacrifice. Eleven others were injured because of their association with the newspaper. That is why they were targeted, they are all martyrs. Today is the day to remember the martyrs. I believe that other newspapers and journals will also adopt similarly constructive and solid attitude in times of national crisis. They do impose patriotic feelings among the people through their writings. There is also a need to be slightly more careful in publishing news. It will be better if this policy is followed by other newspapers as well.

IV

Science and Technology

INSAT 2-E: Precious Gift of Indian Scientists

TODAY IS INDEED a happy occasion for me. I had seen INSAT 2-E when I visited the ISRO facility in Bangalore a few months ago. It looked as if it was gift-wrapped and ready for delivery. It had a shine unmatched by any gift I have seen in my life. And today the same INSAT 2-E satellite is orbiting high up in space. This biggest and most powerful of the satellites built by ISRO is surely one of the most precious gifts of Indian science to our mission of nation-building. I, therefore, heartily congratulate Dr. Kasturirangan and his team for their excellent work. The entire nation is proud of you. You have set the pace for the third generation of INSAT satellites. While in Bangalore, I had also seen IRS P-4 and INSAT 3-B in various stages of integration.

We are all happy to know that IRS P-4 will be launched by the end of this month, followed by the launch of INSAT 3-B by October. I am confident that you will be equally successful in your plans. I will be there to watch the launch of IRS P-4 at Sriharikota.

The successful deployment of INSAT 2-E has launched India into a new orbit of an international satellite capacity provider. The lease of many of its communications transponders to INTELSAT is the newest feather in your cap. The seal of commercial approval by INTELSAT will reassure other customers of our capabilities in this specialized field, which has so far been the exclusive domain of a few organizations in the developed countries.

INSAT is now the world's largest domestic satellite system

Address to the INSAT 2-E team of ISRO scientists, New Delhi, 8 May 1999

both in broadcasting and in telecommunications. It provides communications in remote and rural areas and during emergencies. In television, the INSAT system has helped increase the coverage from a few transmitters in major cities in the early '80s to a total coverage of the entire country. With INSAT 2-E, the reach has further extended to Australia in the east and Central Europe in the west. This will help in Indian television to expand its appeal to new international audiences. INSAT is a good example of how user agencies have jointly contributed to managing such a complex system. I congratulate the INSAT Coordination Committee for ensuring that crucial sectors of the nation like developmental communications, rural education, school, and college level education are an important component of the INSAT system. In future, INSAT will become important in areas like information technology and tele-medicine, thus making available the benefits of the latest technology to the common person.

ISRO's latest success would not have been possible but for the excellent efforts put in by our scientists and engineers, and their teams, which were well supported by our industries. It is a shining example of the Swadeshi spirit, which I would like to see extend to all other areas of national endeavour. Your success shows that, given the right opportunities and the environment, our scientists and engineers can match the best in the world. It has been my government's endeavour to provide such an enabling environment to all our scientists. It is our national resolve to use advanced technologies to accelerate the pace of our national development. The Space endeavour in our country is an excellent example of translating such a vision into reality. It is truly an example of Jai Vigyan.

I wish the Indian space programme a bright future in the next century.

Make India a Technology Power in the New Millennium

EXACTLY A YEAR ago India made an important tryst with destiny in the desert sands of Rajasthan. Five nuclear tests at Pokhran, three on May 11 and two more on May 13, announced India's arrival on the world stage as a nuclear weapons power. But what was unleashed on that was not merely the energy of the atom. Pokhran also produced the power of patriotism and imparted it to all the 100 crore children of Mother India. Pokhran not only brought strength to our national security, but also self-confidence to our national mind. It became the symbol of a Resurgent India—an India ready to take on any challenge, external or internal, on the basis of self-reliance; a strong and prosperous India determined to regain her rightful place in the comity of nations. Pokhran reiterated our commitment to the goal of peace, both in South Asia and in the entire world. But it declared to the world that India would, from now onwards, pursue peace from a position of strength—not weakness. This principled policy of ours has been vindicated by the developments of the past year. We now have a better atmosphere of peace and cooperation in the region than ever before. The world community has seen that India, which is home to one-sixth of humanity, cannot be browbeaten or pressurized by any power.

We have passed through this year of trial and test with our head held high. Economic sanctions failed to frighten us. Technology denials failed to threaten us. For this, I salute all sections of Indian society, but I especially congratulate the great community of Indian scientists.

Friends, we have assembled here today both to commemo-

Speech at a function organized to mark the Technology Day, New Delhi,
11 May 1999

rate Pokhran and, also, to rededicate ourselves to the goal of building a Resurgent India. It was nearly a year ago, in this very auditorium, that my colleague Dr. Joshi had suggested that, in view of the momentous accomplishment of May 11, 1998, we commemorate it as Technology Day. I immediately agreed with his suggestion, and for obvious reasons.

India has never considered military might to be the sole, or even the chief, source of a nation's strength and self-confidence. It is important to us for national security and defence, and we shall never make any compromises on this front. It is only when a nation is secure from all external and internal threats that it can successfully pursue its developmental goals. National security and national development are, hence, inseparable from one another. By commemorating May 11 as Technology Day, we recognize the invaluable contribution of science and technology to both security and development. It is this inter-linkage that we have sought to capture in the slogan Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, which is only an extension of the inspiring motto coined by our beloved late Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Pokhran is, thus, a tribute to the capacity, calibre, and dedication of our nuclear scientists, engineers, technicians, and, of course, jawans. On a broader plane, it is also an honour to all of India's achievements in science and technology—and these achievements are many and multiplying daily.

Friends, we are living in a fast-changing world. Both the speed and the scale of change are mind-boggling. Nothing has been contributing more to these rapid transformations than science and technology. Interestingly, nowhere is this process of change faster than in science and technology itself. To keep up with this change, to understand its dynamics, and to direct it for the fulfilment of the material, social, and cultural needs of humanity is the greatest challenge before all of us. It is as much a challenge before the scientific community as before

governments and political and business leaders. We must admit, however, that we have still to go a long way to fulfill this task. This challenge is overtaking our collective ability to fix it. Many areas of science and technology have advanced so far ahead that they already dazzle us with a glimpse of the enormous possibilities lying in the womb of the new millennium. Yet, it is now certain that vast sections of the human race will enter the new century with problems that could have been easily solved with the scientific and technological knowledge of this century.

Scientists say that the new century will see the advent of a knowledge-driven society. Yet, millions of people in this society will still be condemned to live in the darkness of illiteracy, which is the greatest barrier to knowledge. It is said that the new century will witness spectacular progress in genetic engineering and bio-technology, making new kinds of food and drinks available. Yet, it is certain that hunger and the problem of drinking water will persist for many people across the globe. It is said that Information Technology, which has already brought about revolutionary changes, will shrink the world into a Global Village. Yet, tens of thousands of villages have no proper connectivity even to the nearest town. Science and technology have proved to be the greatest harbinger of prosperity. Yet, we have also seen how a troubling social and moral crisis clouds the material opulence of the rich in the world. This shows that Technology Day is not only about celebration of our successes. It is also a reminder of many of our glaring failures in achieving our developmental goals. The many faces of this paradox are visible in all the countries of the world. They are even more apparent in India. Therefore, how to take India into the new century without the dragging developmental burden of the previous centuries is the greatest task before us today.

In my speech at the ceremony last year to present the Shantiswarup Bhatnagar Prizes, I had outlined a ten-point

agenda to operationalize the motto of Jai Vigyan. I am happy to note that much progress has been made on many of those points since then. I cannot, however, overstate the need to continue to our unflinching efforts in this direction. There is no dearth of information on what needs to be done to strengthen the base of science and technology in India. The Technology Information, Forecasting, and Assessment Council (TIFAC) under the Department of Science and Technology has produced an exhaustive and excellent report on VISION 2020, covering practically all areas of development. Earlier, the Scientific Advisory Council to the Prime Minister had also presented a highly useful two-volume report on the agenda for the future.

What is needed is firm and focused action based on the recommendations contained in these and other reports. In the thirteen months prior to the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, our Government tried to do precisely this. We gave a major thrust to the development of information technology, guided by our conviction that IT is, indeed, India's Tomorrow. We brought in an important patent legislation to upgrade our intellectual property laws in line with global norms. This, I am sure, will greatly encourage the creativity of Indian scientists, including the commercialization of their innovation. The success of the CSIR laboratories in patenting scores of their discoveries and inventions testifies to this fact. Our space programme has proceeded well on schedule, notching up greater successes in the past one year. The launch of INSAT 2-E has once again shown that, given the right policies and working conditions, our scientists will prove themselves to be second to none in the world.

The new telecom policy unveiled recently is designed to bring all the benefits of the communication revolution to both urban and rural India. The draft Agriculture Policy, which we will soon present for a national debate, places great emphasis on scientific and technology inputs to increase productivity and profitability in our farm sector.

Young scientists are the hope of our future. I compliment the Department of Science and Technology for unveiling two innovative schemes aimed at attracting talented youth and students to the adventure and excitement of science. I wish to reassure the nation today that the Government will continue to implement its unfinished agenda in science and technology. For example, the IT Task Force, under the chairmanship of Shri Jaswant Singh, has presented its second and third reports. These will soon be discussed and adopted. We have received very good reports on Knowledge Industries, Food and Agro Industries, and Infrastructure Development by the Prime Minister's Council on Trade and Industry. The important recommendations of these reports need immediate implementation. This is also necessary to strengthen the partnership between the private sector and our vast R and D institutions.

I urge the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Electronics, the Department of Biotechnology, and other Departments to continue to vigorously implement their ongoing programmes. There cannot be any intervals and interruptions in science and technology. Indeed, our scientific community deserves to be congratulated for making India's progress in science and technology immune to the ups and downs in politics. Today, on the occasion of Technology Day, let us take a pledge to act faster and work better. Let us remove all impediments in India's march to becoming a major Technological Power in the next century.

India's Ideal—Peace on Earth, Skies and Everywhere

YOU HAVE JUST witnessed the successful launch of three satellites into space through our indigenously developed Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle from Sriharikota. Both the rocket and the principal satellite—the IRS P-4 or Oceansat—were designed and built in India. Further, for the first time, a Korean and a German satellite were also sent into space by an Indian rocket launcher.

Today is a proud day for Indian science. India's space programme, which has been going from strength to strength, has scaled a new height of global excellence. Just a few weeks ago, the locally-built INSAT 2-E had been sent into space. These two events have shown India's mastery of all aspects of space technology. I join all of you in heartily congratulating all the personnel of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), along with those in other national institutions and industries who have contributed to this successful launch.

Personally, for me it was very thrilling to be here and watch the mighty engines of the rocket roar and send it hurtling into space. It renewed my confidence in the strength and capabilities of our people. The continuing success of our space programmes show how reaching for the stars is, literally, within our grasp,

- If we work with dedication and team-spirit;
- If there are good leaders who have a vision and the ability to enthuse others to reach that vision;

- If there is strong support from the Government; and
- If our scientific establishment and industry work together in a spirit of partnership.

I urge all my countrymen to learn from ISRO's success and pursue excellence in whatever work we may be engaged in. We must fill our hearts and minds with self-confidence in our own capabilities. By doing so, we can, while we reach the stars, solve the many problems that beset us on earth. Indeed, India's space programme has, right from the start, been designed to help in solving the day-to-day problems of our citizens. It supports our developmental initiatives in weather forecasting, broadcasting and telecommunications, mapping our land and water resources, and increasing our understanding of various scientific phenomena.

The Oceansat satellite that is now orbiting our earth will give information about the seas around us. Space and Oceans are the two new frontiers that mankind will explore extensively in the new century and millennium. The benefits from this exploration belong to the entire mankind. We in India are determined not only to avail these benefits for the welfare of all our citizens, but also to participate actively in the exploration of the Sky and the Seas. ISRO's successful programmes are an illustration of our determination to make India a Space Power in the next century. Today, we live in a Global Village that has come into being due to the rapid advances in telecommunications and information technology. These advances would have been unthinkable without the application of space technology. In this Global Village India must compete with nations, not just for investment, but also in markets abroad.

For some time, the high-resolution photographs taken by our already orbiting satellites have been used all over the world. Intelsat, which is an international consortium, is now leasing some of the capacity of the recently-launched INSAT 2-E. Today's launch has also, for the first time, carried two foreign

satellites into space. In future, many more foreign-owned satellites will be launched on Indian rockets. This shows that our space scientists and technologists are now planting India's flag not just in space, but also in this global market place.

At Pokhran last year, our nuclear scientists demonstrated their world-class capabilities in service of national security. The launch of Agni 2 missile further underscored our indigenous strengths in science and technology. ISRO's success today has once again shown that our scientists and technologists are second to none in the world. Today, therefore, all of us can truly say with pride: Jai Vigyan. All our efforts in science and technology are guided by the single ideal of pursuit of making India a strong, prosperous and peaceful nation. Long ago, our sages chanted the mantra of peace: *Antariksha Shantih, Prithivi Shantih, Shantireva Shantih*. India wants peace in the skies, peace on earth and peace everywhere. We will continue to strive for such universal peace by pursuing the path of strength and development.

Close the Gap Between Common Man and Science

I AM EXTREMELY happy to be present in this function to give awards to scientists and technologists for their outstanding contributions in science and for national progress. At the outset, my heartiest congratulations to all the awardees. I also compliment Shri Om Prakash Bhasin Foundation for instituting these prestigious annual awards to honour our distinguished scientists.

Speech while giving away Om Prakash Bhasin Awards, New Delhi,
21 June 1999

There are many ways to promote excellence in Indian science. One of the most important ways is social recognition of top-class performance in science and technology. For a country as large as India, and for a scientific establishment as large as ours, we need to have more avenues for encouraging and recognizing scientific excellence.

I appeal to philanthropic institutions and industrial establishments to redouble their efforts to promote scientific talent in the country through awards, fellowships, and sponsorship of special R&D projects. The media, in particular, has a unique role in according prestige to high-quality scientific performance.

I am happy to note that Indian scientists are making rapid strides in many areas of research and its application for social good. Their work reminds me of how valuable their contribution is to the realization of our common dream: the dream of making India a strong, prosperous, and self-confident nation.

The most thrilling experience of the truth came when I witnessed the successful launch of PSLV satellite at Sriharikota last month. What is etched in my mind is not only the sight of the tricolour bearing satellite hurtling into the sky, but also the triumphant faces of all the members of ISRO's team that bore the message: "Indian scientists are second to none in the world."

Even ordinary Indians who watched the PSLV launch on that day felt a wave of national pride surging in them. They felt the same when our nuclear scientists enabled us to successfully conduct the atomic tests at Pokhran last year. I believe that many other areas of Indian science can generate similar successes that make Indians confident of our indigenous capabilities.

It is this unshakable faith in us, and this firm commitment to the principle of self-reliance, which alone can make India a

great nation. Self-reliance, however, does not mean isolation. In today's inter-dependent world, technological progress is the integration of results of multiple scientific research from many countries. Technology denial by certain developed countries, therefore, is against the spirit of science and human progress. Geopolitics should not come in the way of international cooperation in science.

Indian scientists and technologists have a higher responsibility than ever before for the progress of our indigenous capabilities for national development. We must strive ceaselessly to make India a strong scientific power in the 21st century, knowing that technology is the newest tool that gives strength to national security and development.

The achievements of nuclear and space scientists, as also the scientists and engineers in the various laboratories of the Defence Research Development Organization (DRDO) show how immensely useful is the contribution of Indian science to our national security. Science is one of the most important inputs in modern warfare and defence strategies.

National security, however, cannot—and should not be understood only in military terms. What all of us should be truly concerned about is our economic security, food security, health security and the security of decent living for all our citizens. We need to win the war against poverty, want, squalor, disease, malnutrition, illiteracy, and homelessness.

One of the most important factors that can help us win this war against underdevelopment and unbalanced development is, once again, science. I, therefore, appeal to all our scientists to work with the spirit of a soldier in this national endeavour. The spirit of a soldier, his patriotism, discipline, dedication, teamwork, and an unflinching determination to achieve the goal.

In addition to these qualities, our scientists must inculcate

one more quality in order to win this battle for all round development. They must close the gap between science and the common man. They must also bridge the gap between the lab and the land. Science should aid the Indian *kisan* to meet the challenge of increased food production, better preservation, value addition, and efficient distribution. At the same time, our scientists should also bring to the nation the benefits of biotechnology, which promises to be the most exciting area of science in the coming decades.

There is yet another challenge before Indian scientists. They should assist the Government and educational institutions in the non-governmental sector to improve the standards of science education in our schools and colleges. The learning of science should not remain a routine, examination-oriented, burdensome exercise. Rather, it should become a mind opening experience, enhancing the problem-solving capabilities of our young people.

Let me conclude by quoting a thoughtful message from our Upanishads. It says that whatever is done by human beings, the same can be done better with the application of science. Like any other profession, science, when practised like a "sadhana", increases manifold our good work.

All of you will agree that nation building is a Yagna in itself. Indeed, for all of us it is the most sacred collective endeavour. I appeal to our scientific and technological community to help accomplish this yagna successfully by making their knowledge and dedicated work as ahuti.

Space Applications for Sustainable Development

I EXTEND A warm welcome to all of you. We are happy to be hosting this Second Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development of Asia and the Pacific, organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. As we stand on the threshold of a new millennium, we can be legitimately proud that the human race in the late 20th century has finally fulfilled the dream of the previous centuries and millennia. Unlike in the past, space no longer remains an unreached and unreachable frontier of wonderment. Of course, there never will be a time when humans will cease to marvel and muse at the limitless void around us that is home to our universe. But for the first time in human history, we have succeeded in extending our reach to space. No longer are imagination and dreams our only vehicles to travel to the abode of planets and stars; rather, our satellites and spacecraft and telescopes and computer networks have given us the practical means to begin our voyage in the space ocean.

The first thought that comes to my mind on this occasion, and which I am sure all of you will agree with, is that this is humankind's collective journey—and not of any single country or group of countries. Regional cooperation, as a part of larger international cooperation, is at the very heart of the exploration and application of space. There are several reasons why this is, and ought to be, so. Nations can have boundaries on land. In a limited sense, they have sovereign rights even over the waters of the seas and oceans. But such a thing is unthinkable in space. By its very nature, space belongs to all of us. It is indeed the biggest common resource enveloping our Mother Earth.

Address at the opening session of Second ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Space, New Delhi, 18 August 1999

Indeed, nothing has contributed more to the shrinking of our world into a Global Village than space technology. Hence, only through the widest possible global cooperation can we realize its vast potential gains. Needless to add, technology denials and such other negative practices are an anathema to space research and its applications for sustainable development.

The high cost of space research makes it additionally imperative that the nations of the world pool their scientific, technological, and other forms of resources for common benefit. Your conference is an important step in the path of continued regional and international cooperation.

The countries of Asia and the Pacific share many challenges to sustainable development, especially in the areas of food security, water conservation, environment protection, disaster management, education, and healthcare. Our region supports around sixty percent of the global population. More than half of that lives in two countries—India and China. Sustainable development of the human race in the next century and millennium is, therefore, unthinkable without a similar vision for the Asia-Pacific region. There is an urgent need to re-focus our collective attention, as also the attention of the entire world, to achieve improved quality of life for the ever-increasing population in this region. Developed countries of the world, and also, of the region, bear greater responsibility for the realization of this vision.

Space technology is making our task easier. Already it is a boon in meeting several developmental needs—telecommunications, broadcasting, weather forecasting, remote sensing, and scientific research. The revolutionary advances in information technology, which depend heavily on space technology, are further widening its applications for faster, equitable, and eco-friendly socio-economic development. We should harness the great potential of space technology to create large-scale employment in newer and more efficient areas of development. We should use it to increase community access

to public health, family welfare, education, and other skill improvement programmes, including improved agricultural practices. Water scarcity is fast emerging as a major problem in most countries. Space technology should, therefore, be harnessed for better water management. This region has access to more than 1,700 satellite transponders. New satellite and Internet technologies promise to create a bandwidth explosion, which will make high-speed multi-media communication cheaper, easier, and universally accessible. We should use this capacity in the best way to promote businesses, industries, and services in the region. We should reach its benefits to more and more farmers and disadvantaged groups like illiterate rural women, unskilled workers, and dispersed populations in remote and hilly areas. We should also use it to enrich our languages, arts, and traditions. This can also build mutual respect and understanding among different cultures and countries.

Disaster management is another area that is crying out for regional and global cooperation. This region has access to state-of-the-art remote sensing, meteorological, search and rescue, and navigational satellites. These could be well used in jointly managing common natural disasters. Natural disasters can strike any country. As you are aware, the state of Orissa in our country has recently suffered immense devastation caused by a super cyclone. Similar calamities have also struck other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. We must use our satellite networks in the best possible way so that every country in the region has the most comprehensive early warning available to it, irrespective of whether it has its own satellites or not.

Distinguished delegates, India has always believed in the *mantra* of cooperation in science and technology—as also in all other areas that promote human development. Our considerable achievements in space research and applications, which have sprung from a strong self-reliant approach, owe significantly to international cooperation. Over the past thirty years, we have developed a robust and versatile space infrastructure tasked to national development. We are ready to offer this infrastructure to one and all on the principle of mutual benefit. India is ready

to share her experience and expertise with the countries in the region and work jointly towards achieving a sustainable living for the peoples in this region both through bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

Five years back, the first ESCAP ministerial meeting at Beijing had launched an ambitious Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development in the Asia and the Pacific. We have contributed our mite to the success of this programme. We are prepared to contribute more. Lastly, I cannot overemphasize the need for developing space applications for global peace and security. Space must become the newest frontier not for an arms race but for humankind's collaborative and common race for development. The ancient sages of India, in the Shanti Mantra or Mantra for Peace, have enjoined upon all of us:

Antariksha Shantih
Prithivih Shantih

(May peace prevail in space. And may peace prevail on Earth)

We, the Asia-Pacific countries, have been the cradle of culture, religion, and human resources development. The countries in the Asia-Pacific have a glorious history, providing extraordinary leadership in philosophy, thoughts on harmonious human development, and traditional practices that ensure reverence for the environment. I am sure that the region will again set an example to the world in the use of space applications for sustainable all-round development.

I hope that this second Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific will come out with a practical strategy to realize this vision. As we stand at the threshold of the new millennium, the time has come to bring about a renaissance in the Asia Pacific region to herald peace and progress to all the nations.

I wish the Conference all success.

Develop Science for India's All-round Growth

LET ME BEGIN by extending hearty greetings for the New Year and the New Century to all of you. I warmly welcome all foreign scientists who are present in our midst. Today's event has a special significance for me. It is the first major public function in which I am participating after the dawn of the new century. And, what better way to do so than to be associated with the first session of the Indian Science Congress in the 21st century? And what better place than Pune, which is a renowned hub of both *Vigyaan*—that is, the knowledge of science, and *Gyaan*—the higher knowledge of life?

The sun has just set on the 20th century, and we are still in the early morning hours of the new century. It is difficult not to be conscious of the weight of history at this moment. So much of what we have seen and lived through now belongs to the past. The future, in the form of the 21st century, which seemed so distant until recently, has already become the present. Our aspirations for tomorrow are crying out to be the agenda of action today. What has happened is not a routine chronological phenomenon, notwithstanding the fact that, this year, it necessitated the novelty of making our computers Y2K OK. Today there is a question in every thinking mind on this planet: Our computers are ready for the new century, but are we? Will the old world order, with all its well-known problems and deficiencies, continue into the new century? How can we build a new world order that is better and happier for everybody? These questions await answers not only from leaders of governments, politicians, and intellectuals, but also from scientists. After all, science and technology were one of the most powerful forces that shaped the content and the

Speech at the 87th Annual Session of Indian Science Congress, Pune,
3 January 2000

course of the 20th century. The honour of being chosen as "The Person of the Century", by a reputed international magazine, has indeed gone to a scientist—Albert Einstein. The imprint of your profession on the 21st century is going to be even more sharp and deep.

Humanity, therefore, is making a pressing demand on science and technology. The world is not merely looking for new knowledge and new products in the new century. It is especially looking for such knowledge and such products that will reduce human misery, remove hunger and want from our planet, improve the living conditions for all the people in all the countries—and do all this while protecting the environment, our precious planetary inheritance.

In the century that has just ended, science gained the knowledge of the dance of galaxies in outer space, as also the dance of micro-particles in the womb of the atom. While continuing with this search for the mysteries of the material world, science should simultaneously redouble its quest for those as-yet-unknown ways leading to human happiness for all in the new century. Achievement of this lofty objective calls for a greater integration of scientists and technologists in formulating policies, as well as in their implementation, both nationally and internationally. So far, science and technology have reached the people indirectly through the intermediation of the industry and the market forces. They now have to be made critical inputs in decision-making in society, economy, and governance.

The new century, thus, needs a new mindset. These days there is a lot of excitement about the revolutionary phenomenon of technological convergence—namely, the coming together of computers, telecom, television, and electronics on a common digital principle. It seems to me that the world equally needs convergence of a different kind—the convergence of minds and objectives. No longer can market forces be driven by objectives that are different from the demands made by the people from the governments they have elected. No longer can governments deliver the goods without using science and

technology intelligently. Similarly, no longer can scientists and technologists pursue their objectives without harmonizing them with the needs of the market and the people. It is this growing interdependence between science, technology, industry, business, society, government, and the environment that seems to me to be the hallmark of the new century.

Superimposed on this is the other prominent trend of our times—namely, the growing interdependence among nations. Greater interdependence calls for greater cooperation. The new century will make far greater demand for global cooperation in science and technology than has been achieved in the past century. Unlike in previous centuries, no country, however developed, can ensure further progress of science and technology on the strength of its own human and financial resources. Indeed, experience of the past few decades has shown that cooperation itself has become one of the most valuable resources in the progress of science.

Distinguished scientists, I dream to see an India that is a contributor and a beneficiary in equal measure, in this new interdependent and cooperative phase of human history. It is a dream to see India as a highly developed nation in the early decades of the new century—developed socially, economically, culturally, and also in science and technology. It is a dream shared by all Indians—young or old, rich or poor, urban or rural. I urge the Indian Science Congress to pledge itself to mobilize the full strength of our scientific and technological community for the realization of this dream.

I would like to see a far greater and far more result-oriented deployment of science and technology in areas where they are most needed—primary healthcare, sanitation, agriculture, water and soil management, energy conservation, and efficient services that make the life of the common man comfortable. The country needs your valuable inputs especially in those sectors of the economy, such as small industries, agri-processing, handicrafts and artisanry, which are essential for achieving our triple national objectives: employment generation, equitable wealth creation, and social justice. We must not

forget that most of our craftsmen and artisans belong to Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and other disadvantaged groups.

Disaster management, including early forecasting and prevention of natural disasters, is another area that needs increased attention of our scientists. The devastation and human misery caused by the recent super-cyclone in Orissa has once again sharply highlighted this need.

At the same time, our scientists should also aim to quickly achieve global excellence in frontier areas of science and hi-tech. We now know that advanced technologies can make useful contributions to solving people's basic problems, as is evident, for example, from the amazing applications of space research. However, what determines the destiny of a nation like ours is technological plurality—an appropriate mix of traditional, conventional, and modern technologies, each contributing maximally to the increase in national productivity.

India, of all the developing countries, is well placed to design such an indigenous technological mix. We have a long and strong scientific tradition dating back to ancient and medieval times. After independence, we have vastly enhanced our strength in many areas of science and technology. The country is proud of you for your contributions in agriculture, medicine, metallurgy, space, and nuclear sciences, to name a few areas. We have a new and promising crop of young scientists, including those who are working abroad. All this gives me confidence that Indian science and technology have the potential for a big leap forward in the new century.

All of us know that the propellers for this big leap forward are information technology, bio-technology, and other knowledge-based sectors of S&T. While continuing to strengthen our indigenous industrial base, we must be fully in step with the paradigm shift being caused by IT in the economic activity of the human race.

In the early stages of human civilization, what made some nations rich, and others poor, was the ready availability or non-availability of natural resources. After the industrial

revolution, the driving force of development was the capacity to convert natural resources into material wealth through large scale manufacturing facilities. In the latter half of the last century, finance became the critical form of capital to drive development. We have now entered a new era of knowledge capital where generation, dissemination, and use of knowledge have become the key determinant of wealth creation. Knowledge capital is what will increasingly drive the wheels of the national and global economy and eventually determine the prestige and position of any country in the comity of nations. India is determined not only to be a participant in the IT Revolution, but also to be in its vanguard.

India's successes in IT are already well known. We now must aim to replicate them in all areas of science, technology, and enterprise. The Government would welcome your ideas on how we can create world-class facilities and conditions in India for world-class achievements. The Government has taken some steps in this direction, and I assure you that we shall take many more. We are committed to removing restrictive bureaucratic hurdles. We are committed to strengthening the cooperative network between research laboratories, academic institutions, industry, NGOs, and governmental agencies at the Central, State, and local levels.

We have recently appointed a Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India of Cabinet rank to promote this objective. We would like to further increase the involvement of distinguished scientists like you in the accomplishment of well-targeted national tasks. A number of important measures are needed to translate the vast potential of Indian science into winning performance. As we embark on a new voyage for Indian science in the new century, the broad vision I commend to all of you is: **"Developed Indian Science for India's Accelerated and All-Round Development."** This vision mandates that we together pledge to accomplish some urgent tasks:

- Let us pledge to further improve the standard of science education at all levels.

- Let us especially turn our attention to our children and facilitate their natural creative energies to develop into top-class capabilities when they grow up. While sustained public funding for primary and secondary education is a necessity—indeed, it is an obligation—we need to open new avenues for private sector support for higher and technical education.
- Let us pledge to increase collaboration between our universities, industry, and research and development institutions, including defence research and development. By world standards, India's investments in R&D are wholly inadequate and sub-critical. I would like to see a hike in investments in R&D from the present 0.86 percent of the GDP to one percent this year, and to be further increased to two percent over the next five years. Apart from increasing financial investments, we should increase the synergy among our existing institutions and assets, with an aim to make India a global R&D platform.
- Let us pledge to strengthen our S&T institutions through competent and inspiring leadership—both scientific and administrative. We are proud of what we have built in the past fifty years. We now need to increase their capabilities to meet the challenges from the new national and global realities.
- Let us pledge to promote India's considerable wealth of traditional knowledge by bringing it into the mainstream of our national S&T establishment. For example, there is an immense value hidden in the knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs that our common people, especially tribal people, possess. The initiative taken by the CSIR in networking some of their laboratories with institutions specializing in traditional knowledge can indeed give India global leadership in medicine.
- Let us pledge to fully benefit from the new Intellectual Property Rights regime that is now evolving worldwide. The Government has taken several steps recently to bring

in a strong IPR system in line with the global scene. I am told that a persistent campaign to create awareness about IPR has resulted in an increased number of patents being awarded to Indian scientists. I applaud this effort.

- Let us pledge to spread the culture of Venture Capital and other forms of support for the new knowledge-driven enterprises in India. It is especially necessary to ensure that, besides businessmen, scientists who develop new ideas and products also benefit as these enterprises begin to grow in India.
- Let us pledge to nurture an atmosphere of innovation, adventure, high ambition, and high achievement in every area of Indian science.

As we enter the new century, I recall to you the stirring words of the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who said: **"Scientists are a minority in league with the future."** Our countrymen look to you with high expectations to make India a great power in science and technology in the near future.

This is essential for the realization of a higher goal we have set for ourselves: **To make the 21st Century India's Century—*Ikkeesvin Shatabdi, Bharat ki Shatabdi*.** It is also essential for the realization of an even higher goal: **To achieve peace, progress, and happiness for the entire humanity in the new century.**

With these words, I am pleased to inaugurate the 87th Indian Science Congress and wish it a great success.

Establish Right Chemistry Between Lab and Industry

I AM HAPPY to be present at the National Chemical Laboratory on this momentous occasion—the conclusion of its Golden Jubilee year celebrations. This is no doubt a proud day for India's scientific community, and especially those associated with the NCL. The entire country shares your joy as it recalls fifty years of outstanding service to the nation by one of our foremost scientific institutions.

We have to be grateful to the architects of modern India. They were men and women of great vision and foresight. They were well aware that the newly independent country's economic progress and the well being of its citizens were inseparably linked to the development of science and technology.

They established the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to provide a strong foundation for the growth of science and its application through various technologies. CSIR was thus born of a dream. The dream of a nascent nation, subjugated for centuries, to stand up as an equal in the comity of nations. It was the dream of a liberated country, proud of its scientific and cultural heritage, and determined to chart its own way to emerge as a secure, self-reliant, modern, and economically advanced nation.

The National Chemical Laboratory is one of the earliest laboratories to have been set up under the aegis of the CSIR. Today, as we celebrate its fifty years, we pay our respectful homage to the memory of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who laid the foundation for this great institution. We also salute the memory of Professor Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, Professor Homi

Speech at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the National Chemical Laboratory, Pune, 3 January 2000

Bhabha, and many other pioneering Indian scientists whose faith in resurgent India was persevering and indomitable.

I am happy to note that NCL has fulfilled the dreams and aspirations of its founders. It has emerged as a vibrant and internationally recognized research laboratory devoted to the field of chemical sciences. Its scientific contributions have received accolades around the world. The recognition of the pioneering research done by Dr. Mashelkar in this very laboratory won him the Fellowship of the prestigious Royal Society in London. It is heartening that his Guru, Prof. M. M. Sharma, who too is an FRS, is also in our midst today.

NCL was established long before the chemical industry took roots in India. It has indeed helped the Indian chemical industry in all its phases of growth. Thus, one can say that NCL established the right chemistry between itself and the industry, much before the need for such partnership began to be widely appreciated.

Today India's chemical industry is among the most developed in the developing world. It also compares well with its counterpart in the developed world. It is vibrant with innovation and entrepreneurship. NCL's assistance to the Indian chemical industry in areas such as pesticides, organic fine chemicals, catalysts, pharmaceutical intermediates, and polymers, has been widely acknowledged as path breaking. I commend your institution for another important reason. Since the 1990's, NCL has blazed a new trail in "Knowledge Export" to many advanced countries of the world. It has set an example to other research laboratories by filling and securing the largest number of patents outside of India, especially in the USA, creating significant intellectual capital for our country. Not surprisingly, today NCL is a favoured destination for many organizations around the world to perform collaborative research.

Distinguished scientists, we have now entered a new

century. Our country, however, is faced with many old challenges. India needs to conquer poverty and underdevelopment. For this, our agriculture must become far more productive and our industries need to become globally competitive. The inputs of science and technology are critical for the realization of these objectives. They are vital for improving the living standards of our growing population in food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, sanitation, safe drinking water, clean air—besides providing affordable, yet high-quality consumer products. I must also add here the responsibility of our scientific and technological establishment to respond to the growing needs of our national security—both external and internal. The challenges in this field are becoming increasingly complex, needing highly sophisticated intellectual, managerial, and infrastructural capabilities.

We thus see that India's needs span the entire spectrum—from the most basic to the most advanced. Chemistry and the chemical industry can make an important contribution to meeting them. What they have already contributed in the past is quite weighty. But what the present and the future expect from them is weightier still. We need new chemistry and new applications for it in industry, that promote rapid economic development, while protecting our environment. They should harness our rich bio-diversity and, also, the vast repository of India's traditional knowledge. They should develop new processes and products that excel in quality and exceed in performance against global benchmarks.

I am confident that our S and T establishment, and especially those working in chemistry and in the chemical industry will rise to the occasion. In this endeavour, I am sure the NCL will participate with even greater successes than it has recorded in the past five decades.

Before I conclude, I wish to express my pleasure at having launched the CD-ROM series on India's traditional medicine, based on fifty plants most widely used in Ayurvedic practices.

The vast knowledge contained in this disc includes both ancient knowledge and that based on modern scientific research. Preserving our heritage for posterity in such electronic databases, and making them available for commercial and scientific use globally, is a highly commendable project. Earlier, the CSIR had successfully won the patent battle on turmeric. With this project, it has taken another important step that helps in preventing wrong patents being granted to foreigners for natural and intellectual resources that rightfully belong to us.

I wish all of you well, as you cross one landmark and begin your journey towards the next. I congratulate every one of you for making what NCL is today.

Seize the Opportunities of the Knowledge Revolution

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to be at this gathering of talented young scientists and present the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prizes. I congratulate the winners of this award that brings with it recognition, honour, and prestige. The award, however, also comes with a responsibility—to continue your pursuit of new frontiers in science and technology with single-minded devotion and high standards of ethics. Your success and commitment will be a source of inspiration for the young talent in our schools and colleges and help halt the declining popularity of science. The importance of this cannot be overstressed. For, greater achievements in science and technology by harnessing our national talent are the best way to secure India's future in the 21st century.

Speech at the function to present Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prizes, New Delhi, 21 February 2000

In this context, I am happy that the recently concluded Science Congress was a grand success with over five hundred thousand children visiting the science and technology exhibition. We have to tap this enthusiasm to meet the challenges of the new century. Today being the birth anniversary of Dr Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, let us pay our humble tribute to this great man who played a major role in shaping India's post-Independence quest for scientific and technological excellence.

It is because of the vision and dedication of stalwarts like Dr Bhatnagar, Dr Homi Bhabha, and Dr P. C. Mahalanobis, who placed their country above everything else, that India can today boast of a vast, diversified, and world-class scientific and technological base. Let us, therefore, on this occasion rededicate ourselves to their singular quest—that India's scientific and technological abilities and achievements shall be second to none.

My government fully recognizes the centrality of science and technology in our endeavour to transform India into a modern, secure, self-reliant, and prosperous nation. The entire nation today reposes great faith in India's scientists and technologists. At the same time, responsibility devolves upon our scientific community to help create a forward-looking, forward-moving India.

We are all excited about the opportunities of the new century that we have entered. There are deep concerns, however, as we move ahead. Our exploding population is one. We have just announced a National Population Policy that addresses this issue. But this challenge, too, can be converted into an opportunity for the emergence of a "Young India"—youthful, energetic, and idealistic. After all, by the year 2015, over half of our population will be less than twenty years old! This part of our population is either just born or is about to be born. What it means is that we have a tremendous opportunity to focus on these young people so that they are equipped to shape the destiny of our great nation in the 21st century.

This "Young India" can be a source of strength for ensuring strategic, food, and environmental security and for bringing about the "Knowledge Revolution". We need to make certain that the "Knowledge Revolution" does not bypass us as did the Industrial Revolution.

Indeed, knowledge-based industries, which are linked to advanced technology and R&D, constitute the single most important factor that could hasten the process of taking India into the group of developed countries. India does not lack in resources and skilled science and technology manpower. What is needed is proper use of these resources and better harnessing of talent.

To seize the opportunities of the "Knowledge Revolution", we have to generate globally marketable knowledge assets and internationalize the "Made in India" brand. It is in this context that I have set up a Task Force on Pharmaceuticals and Knowledge-based Industries under the chairmanship of my colleague, Dr. Joshi. I look forward to this task force providing the blueprint for India's transformation into a "knowledge power".

Yet another opportunity that we must seize is in the area of exports. The Indian economy can derive strength from technology-led exports and export of technology. Adding value and creating wealth through creative reassessment, redistribution and repositioning of our intellectual capital and material resources can help us realize our dream of a prosperous and developed India. This is a challenge for my scientist friends assembled here today.

Since time immemorial, India has been known for her people's innovative skills. Even a village artisan and mechanic has the capacity and ability to improvise. This was evident at the exposition during the Indian Science Congress in Pune where farmers and artisans from all over the country demonstrated their useful and novel innovations.

It is, therefore, all the more necessary that those involved with modern Science and Technology should team up with grassroots innovators to help them realize the full potential of their inherent creative skills. It is for this reason that we have set up a National Innovation Foundation to help grassroots innovators in their creative endeavours. I would urge you to couple your excellence in science with the native creativity of our people and thus create the winning advantage.

I thank you for this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you.

Make Nuclear Technologies Economically Competitive

AS I FLEW over the Kaiga project site a little while ago, I saw the beauty of lush tropical forests surrounding the magnificent domes of the two nuclear power reactors. This is the India of my vision: a nation that preserves its heritage even while marching forward and embracing the latest in science and technology for rapid development.

This 220 megawatt pressurized heavy water reactor is indigenously designed, meets the latest safety standards, and has state-of-the-art technology, including computerized controls. It went critical last September and is now synchronized to the grid.

That apart, this nuclear power plant also incorporates a full-scope simulator for superior and comprehensive training of operators. This, and its companion unit at Kaiga, will augment

Speech while dedicating to the nation the second unit of Kaiga Atomic Power Station, Kaiga, 5 March 2000

power supply to the southern grid.

This success symbolizes India of the twenty-first century.

For the last three decades, nuclear power has proven to be a viable, clean, and safe source of energy. Energy is an essential ingredient for rapid social and economic development. Our per capita energy consumption must be increased substantially before the benefits of growth can reach all parts of our country, including rural areas.

As sources of fossil fuels like coal and oil fast deplete, nuclear power will become increasingly important, contributing substantially to the energy sector of our country. This will be true for the rest of the world, too. The nuclear sector, which had slowed down in the industrialized countries in the recent past, is now beginning to pick up. In Asia, nuclear power generation is beginning to increase rapidly to meet growing demand.

Having overcome technological challenges, it is time for us to cut costs. Technologies, to be widely accepted, should be economically competitive, lest they are edged out. I commend your efforts to reduce project gestation period to five to five-and-a-half years. This will definitely cut costs and accelerate the progress of the nuclear power sector and I promise you my government's full support.

Friends, science and technology should be harnessed for the welfare of humankind and not its destruction. Over the years, we followed a policy of restraint in the area of nuclear weapons. Finally, in May 1998 we were compelled to exercise the nuclear option due to deterioration of the regional security environment.

I had declared at that time that India is now a nuclear weapon state and that we would follow a "no first use" policy. This shows our confidence in our nuclear strength. It also shows our desire that weapons of mass destruction should not

be used by anybody.

I wish to reiterate India's commitment to time-bound and comprehensive global nuclear disarmament. But till all weapons of mass destruction are dismantled, we will continue to be guided by the imperative of India's strategic autonomy and the need to maintain a credible minimum nuclear deterrent.

Every Indian is proud of the fact that despite sanctions being imposed on us, the capacity factors of our nuclear power plants have gone up considerably. Last year, the Nuclear Power Corporation gave a dividend to the Government of over rupees fifty crore. This indicates that we are continuing on the path of self-reliance in the nuclear sector and our progress shall not be hindered. I would urge our scientists to work with renewed vigour to master the emerging frontiers of technology so that we can defeat today's neo-colonialism exercised through technology control.

My government is committed to increase funding for research and development from one percent of the GDP to two percent in five years. I would like to assure the young talent of this country that my government will fully support them in their efforts to make a career in science. For this purpose, we are preparing a plan to assure a guaranteed career profile for our young boys and girls, who are highly talented in science, right from the ten plus two stage, provided they opt for a career in research in India and live up to their initial promise.

After taking over as Prime Minister in 1998, I have been to the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Mumbai and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research in Kalpakkam. Today I am at the Kaiga Atomic Power Plant site. The nuclear sector is close to my heart and I see nuclear energy playing a very important role in our country's development and security.

I congratulate the management and staff of the Nuclear

Power Corporation for their achievement—both in operating the existing nuclear power plants efficiently and in executing new projects.

With these words, I dedicate the second unit of the Kaiga Atomic Power Station to the nation.

V

Education, Art and Culture

Craftsmen are Architects of the Nation

FIRST OF ALL, I would like to congratulate all the craftsmen and weavers who are the recipients of today's National Awards. Our craftsmen are the architects of the Nation and our weavers weave the tapestry of nation's prosperity. The recipients of these awards come from different parts of the country and belong to various sections of our society. Each one of them is master of his craft and practises his own art style. They represent our traditions, our customs, our languages and ethos. It is their excellent craftsmanship and their dedication to it, which has kept this rich tradition of ours alive.

India has a history of five thousand years of this tradition of craftsmanship. Before the advent of industrialization, most of our people were engaged in their own professions. Self employment was the order of the day. Whether it was agriculture or manufacturing of goods of daily use, people were pursuing their own professions. As Shri Keshubhai has said, our skilled artisans and craftsmen used to produce goods of daily use ranging from the construction of massive temples to manufacture of a needle. It is also worth mentioning that our artisans and craftsmen had no formal training in their crafts. Such facilities were non-existent. But the families used to have long tradition of such craftsmanship. Family used to be the training ground for the craftsmen and their work arena too. It is heartening to note that this five thousand years old tradition not only continues to this day, but is getting richer day by day. It is not only a matter of production of goods and of their marketing, but it has become an inseparable part of our culture. Even today, while embroidering a scarf for her daughter's marriage, a woman not only puts in her skill into it,

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi while giving away National Awards to Master Craftsmen and Weavers, New Delhi, 23 May 1999

but also imbues her affection, her emotions and her blessings. Can we compare the price of such embroidered scarf with that of a common item produced for marketing?

During the British period, condition of our handicrafts and cottage industry deteriorated to a great extent. The industry was made to suffer and efforts were made to decimate it so that goods manufactured in Britain could find a market here. We have heard of muslin of Dhaka. In order to wipe out the craftsman weaving such a fine fabric, their thumbs were chopped off. After independence, efforts for promotion of Khadi and Cottage industry started. Every region of India is known for its special technical skill. The rich *Zari* of Banaras, silk of Kanchipuram, Baluchari of Bengal, Sambalpuri of Orissa, Chanderi of Madhya Pradesh, Balrampuram of Kerala, Gadwal of Andhra Pradesh are representatives of this vast rich tradition. Similar craft of Tamilnadu, *Chikan* of Lucknow, wood craft of Saharanpur, bamboo craft of Eastern India have charmed us for long. I was in Northeastern states of Manipur and Mizoram yesterday and a day before. The handloom and handicraft of that area has a unique aesthetics of its own. This tradition must be protected and I assure you, that we will protect it. These two industries are very important from the point of view of employment generation and these contribute a considerable share to our exports. In the beginning there were apprehensions of extinction of this handicraft in the face of industrialization, modernization and liberalization, but now this threat is no more there. We will not allow such a thing to happen.

There is a vast scope for exports too. Shri Rana has presented some statistics and I do not want to repeat them. If we consider the number of persons employed in these two industries and, the export earnings of the industries then we may come to the conclusion that these have not been paid attention they deserved. We have tried to rectify these errors of the past during the last 13 months. Had we been allowed more time, we would have streamlined the entire process. There is one more thing, which should be kept in mind. Who

are these people engaged in handicrafts and handloom industries? Most of them are people from poor sections, from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Sixty per cent of these crafts men and weavers are women, who work very hard. I see them working in Lucknow, how they make *Chikan*. With this in view, if these sectors develop extensively and intensively, then we can introduce latest technologies, we can provide soft loans, and we can arrange for marketing of the products. Shri Rana has just announced opening of four "*Haat Bazaars*." It is just a beginning . We are not going to stop at only four. We will make them eight and then sixteen and so on. We have appreciated the richness of our handicrafts, being prepared by the craftsmen in their dingy homes working laboriously, but have we ever thought how this industry would prosper and how this art would flourish, if we are unable to get a good market for their product and if remunerative prices are not received for them. Therefore, marketing facility is of paramount importance.

Our goods are in great demand abroad. Handloom is a labour-intensive industry and is a non-polluting one. One can earn working at his or her house and can do full justice to his or her art. Not much electricity is required. We can increase national income with the cooperation of these sectors. Unemployment too can be reduced. And we can attain decentralization of assets. We all know that competition is going to be stiffer. There are the apprehensions what will happen to our handloom sector, how it is going to survive competition after the year 2005 when there will be unrestricted trade in textiles? We have to make necessary arrangements right from this day. There is still time for 2005 to come and we must make best use of the time gap that we have at our disposal. We must make our handloom industry competitive. Our Government is committed to both these objectives. Shri Rana referred to certain schemes which had been discontinued. These schemes are being revived. More facilities are being provided. But the available facilities are not enough, we are not satisfied with these. Yet whatever limited resources we

have and whatever limited time the Government had, a good beginning has been made and I assure you, this process will continue further and handicraft and handloom will prove to be the two pillars of our economy.

I am told that blue-print for Carpet Technology Institute of India, Bhadoi was prepared almost 17 years ago. This Institute will meet all requirements of carpet industry like human resource development, computerised designs, yarn, threads and quality control of carpets, research and development etc. My Government has taken steps to give concrete shape to a forsaken dream. I hope this Institute, established at a cost of Rs. 18 crore will start functioning soon. I request the Ministry to continue monitoring the schemes, which have been started for the benefit of weavers and craftsmen. These groups must also be involved in this task. Had both these industries not been provided institutionalized credit, they would have been ruined, but, fortunately this did not happen. Industries are flourishing and I, too wish that these industries prosper.

I would like to congratulate all those, who have received these Awards. For those who could not win the Awards, better luck next time. I wish you do better. "Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam" which means, what is meditation or Yoga, whatever you do, do it properly; whatever you have decided to do, do it properly. Large industries, millions of workers—this is an altogether different scenario, but to work on handlooms or handicraft you need a precise measure of concentration, without which it is just not possible. Herein it is impossible to work without personal commitment and we are witnessing its consequences. Our handicrafts, our handloom apparels are in great demand all over the country. People are buying these products for their beautiful designs. I think, if better designs are introduced, an effective marketing set up exists, loans are available on easier terms, these industries of handloom and handicraft can prosper and we eagerly want such a progress for these sectors.

Learning Should Strengthen Global Friendship

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to be amongst you this morning. We all have gathered here to remember one of the most remarkable scholars of our time, and one who was a great friend of India.

Academician Babajan Gafurov was a multi-splendoured personality from the Soviet era. He was a historian of international repute. He was also a journalist, an administrator, and a politician. Above all, as befits a true scholar, he was a man of broad vision who believed that the real aim of all learning should be to help strengthen the bonds of friendship, cooperation, and peace between the nations and peoples of the world.

Such men of learning are respected not only in their own country, but all over the world; not only in their own time, but also long after they have departed from this world. We have a saying in Sanskrit:

विद्वत्त्वं नृपत्वं च
नैव तुल्यम् कदाचन
स्वदेशे पूज्यते राजा
विद्वान् सर्वत्र पूज्यते

(There can be no comparison between scholarship and kingship. A king is respected only in his own country, whereas a scholar is respected everywhere.)

The coming together today of scholars from India and several other countries is symbolic of the universal respect that

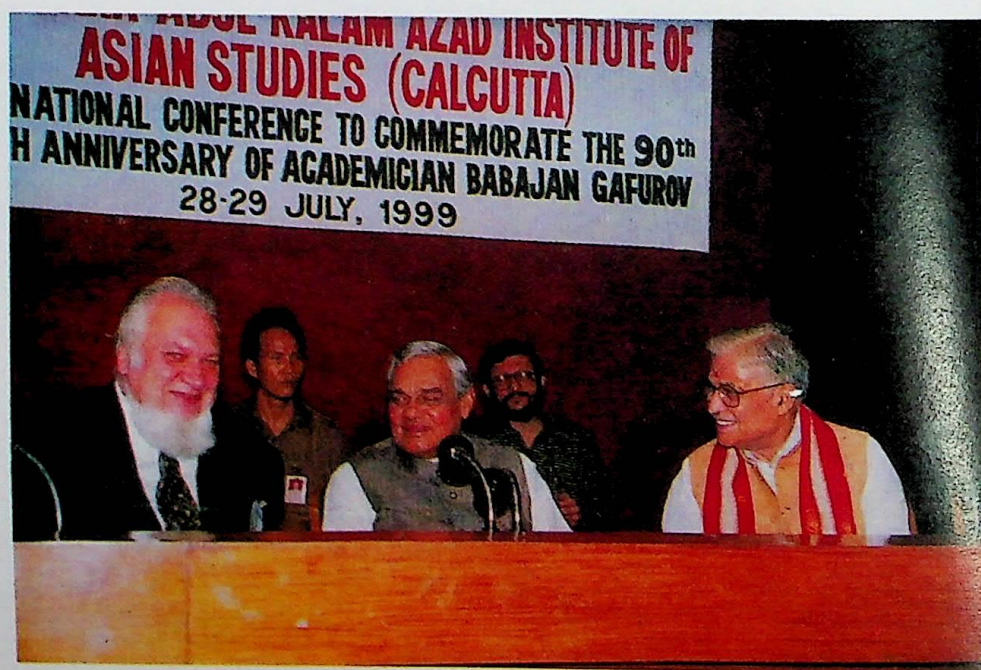
Speech at the International Seminar arranged in connection with the 90th Birth Anniversary of academician Babajan Gafurov, New Delhi, 28 July 1999

Gafurov continues to command more than two decades after his passing away.

It is highly appropriate that this conference has been organized by the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies. Like Gafurov, Maulana Azad was also a multi-faceted personality. He was a scholar-politician who left a deep imprint on India's struggle for freedom.

The world owes a debt of gratitude to Gafurov and other Indologists for revealing an amazing, geo-cultural space, uniting the peoples of the then undivided India, Afghanistan, and the many sovereign republics of Central Asia.

The main capital cities of the Central Asian Republics—Almaty, Ashkabad, Bishkek, Dushanbe, and Tashkent—are geographically closer to Delhi than some of our own major Indian cities. But it is not geography alone that shows our nearness. Closer and stronger still are the bonds of history.



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the International Seminar to commemorate the 90th Birth Anniversary of academician Babajan Gafurov, New Delhi, 28 July 1999

No one can dispute the rich diversity that has characterized, throughout history, the customs and lifestyles of the peoples of this vast geographical region. Yet, a close study of history shows that beneath this diversity has existed a unity that has stood the test of time. Religion, ethnicity, art, music, culture, and language have interacted, intermingled and impacted on each other to create a phenomenon of change and continuity, which is perhaps unique in the world.

Rulers came and went. Borders were drawn and redrawn. But not even the mighty waves of change could render extinct the underlying calm continuity.

To a historian, this process of change and continuity offers a great challenge not only to understand the present in the light of the past, but also the past in the light of the present. Gafurov proved himself to be more than equal to this challenge.

Unshackled by any dogma, and always maintaining a scrupulous fidelity to facts, he dug into the history of his land—Tajikistan—and of that part of the world that most influenced its destiny.

We in India are especially grateful to him for his startling discoveries and corroborations about the historical links between our country and Central Asia. These links reached the peak of their glory during the reign of Emperor Kanishka during the Kushana period.

Many Indian and Soviet historians—most notable among them being Rahul Sankrityan—have also established through painstaking research the close ties between India and Central Asia. Today it is only natural for us to remember the great contribution to the cause of Indology made by the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, which Gafurov headed for more than two decades. He was succeeded by another distinguished scholar, Yevgeny Primakov, who later became the Prime Minister of Russia.

It was under Gufurov's initiative and guidance that the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography in Dushanbe

carried out several major excavations and research studies. At Ajina-Tepe a Buddhist monastery of the seventh or eighth century was excavated where a magnificent twelve-meter-long reclining Buddha in nirvana was found. At Penjikent, statue of *neelkanth* (blue-necked) Shiva of the same period was discovered.

His magnum opus *Tajiki* in two volumes is a veritable encyclopedia on the life and culture of the Tajik people from antiquity to the threshold of the 20th century. It also sheds useful light on many crucial events and developments that influenced the course of Indian history.

I strongly urge the Maulana Azad Institute to have it translated into English and Hindi for the use of Indologists and other scholars in India and elsewhere. Governments and academicians have a common responsibility to ensure that the fruits of such scholarship do not remain the preserve of intellectuals, but reach the common people.

Friends, I am sure your conference will revisit many areas of Gafurov's voluminous historical research. Permit me, however, to comment on one aspect of his personality and his work, which has great relevance for the people all over the world today.

Gafurov was an admirable combination of patriotism, humanism, and liberalism. There was no trace of sectarianism of any kind in him. We now know that although he was a senior functionary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he was also a devout Muslim. He was proud of his religious, ethnic and national identity. At the same time, he had equal respect for all other religions and cultures.

This is one trait that should be emulated by people all over the world, especially in the region that was his subject of study. Intolerance and violence in the name of religion and ethnicity have reared their ugly heads in many parts of Asia. This is a blot on the fair name of the different religions that all of us practice and the different cultures that all of us follow.

The many silk routes that crisscrossed our part of Asia were used by travelling traders to create prosperity, by scholars to spread learning, and men of religion to radiate the message of brotherhood and enlightenment.

We know that these routes were also used by marauders and invaders who brought death and destruction along their path.

Today, if South Asia and Central Asia have to once again journey along the path of prosperity and happiness for all their peoples, the route to take is very clear. It can only be the route of peace, friendship and cooperation among the countries of the region, all of which have similar development challenges. This route must be taken even as we maintain our national sovereignty and separate identities.

Today, a heavy responsibility rests on the governments, intellectuals, and peoples of all the countries of the region. It is our common responsibility to ensure that arms, narcotics, extremism, and terrorism are neither exported nor imported across our borders. As during the best periods of our shared past, let us only exchange arts and culture, music and merchandise, scholarship and enlightenment.

In the past decade, India has taken many initiatives to establish close economic and cultural ties with all the newly independent republics of Central Asia. These initiatives have met with a warm and positive response from all of them. I am aware, however, that much more needs to be done to realize the full potential of this rich geo-cultural family, of which we were and will continue to be members.

With these words, I inaugurate the conference and extend my best wishes to all its participants.

Make Books More Affordable

I AM HAPPY to be here this morning to inaugurate the 14th World Book Fair organized by the National Book Trust of India. Over the years, this biennial event has become popular among both book-lovers and publishers. The World Book Fair is now a gathering point for publishers from India and abroad.

A book fair, however, is more than a trade event or a meeting place for booksellers and publishers. A book fair, more so a world book fair, provides an opportunity to the people to keep track of new ideas and perspectives.

For, books are like windows that open up to the limitless world of knowledge. They encourage us to think and expand our horizon. They are the source of education and intellectual inspiration. Indeed, books serve to enlighten society and, throughout human history, have proved to be more powerful than weapons of death and destruction.

It is, therefore, not surprising that history is replete with instances of burning of books and sacking of libraries, to subjugate people, and establish political, racial or religious supremacy. The power of knowledge, of ideas, of imagination, has always scared those who derive strength from bigotry and fundamentalism.

We have seen books being burned from Berlin to Bradford. We have seen books being banned and authors persecuted. But, neither burning nor banning has been able to suppress the human mind—ideas have survived, new ideas are being born and the quest for knowledge continues.

Books, as we know them today, date back to the advent of the printing press. Before that, they existed as hand-written texts. And, even before that, there was the oral tradition. In the beginning, of course, there was sabda, the word, as Brahma,

Speech while inaugurating the 14th World Book Fair, New Delhi, 5 February 2000

the inner soul. Reverence for knowledge and dharma came to be identified with reverence in the book.

India can boast of a rich oral tradition, dating back many millennia to the composition of the Vedas and Upanishads. Sruti was the means of handing down through generations our ancient texts over centuries. Sruti was that which was heard and realized. It was literature that sought to both enlighten the individual as well as serve the interests of the community.

For instance, the Vedas are as much an instrument of salvation of the individual soul as the prosperity and well-being of the community at large. That oral tradition was to later transform itself into the written tradition. First came the palm leaf manuscript. Later paper was used. Much later came the printing press.

The spoken word of the oral tradition was restricted to those to whom it was passed on. The pothis, for obvious reasons, had limited access. The printing press, however, had a revolutionary impact—millions of people today have access to what was in the beginning sabda.

From serving the basic needs of communicating fundamentals to a child, and thus teaching the child to read and write, a book today serves many purposes. But the common factor of all these purposes still remains the same as that of the oral tradition: disseminating knowledge, basic and specialized.

Knowledge that flows from ideas; knowledge that stems from experience, and knowledge that is born of discoveries.

Above all, knowledge that lifts the darkness of ignorance, intolerance, and inwardness.

The revolution that was brought about by the printing press has yielded place to yet another revolution. The advent of new technology has provided us with new vehicles of knowledge dissemination. Ideas, images, and impressions, instead of leaping out from the pages of a book, now leap out at you from computer screens. Today, instead of reading a book, you can hear an audio book.

In fact, while audio books, at one level, take us back to our oral tradition, at another level, they have made it possible for those who, for a variety of reasons, can neither read nor write, to access knowledge. We are also witnessing a fast shift towards electronic journals, which can be accessed by millions of people, courtesy the information superhighway. A book, therefore, no longer need exist in physical form or between covers.

Will books, then, become extinct? Will libraries disappear and leave us with formless digital volumes that will exist in the netherworld of cyber space? Will the turning of pages be replaced by the clicking of mouse?

Similar apprehensions were experienced with the advent of television, when newspapers wondered whether they would soon cease to exist. But we have seen the power of the printed word, which has survived the onslaught of the audio-visual image. I have no doubt that printed books will survive the cyber age.

To ensure that survival, however, publishers have to play an important role. Books have to be made affordable, so that individual buyers are not constrained by the price line. I do understand that the cost of printing a book has increased over the years. I am happy that this is partly due to the fact that authors have begun to receive their fair share.

One way of overcoming the problem of high prices is to strengthen the system of public libraries. I would urge people not to look forward to official patronage for setting up huge libraries that invariably become unwieldy and inaccessible to the masses. Residential colonies and communities should set up their own libraries. Not only will these be more accessible to the common people, especially children, but they will also foster a sense of community participation in making books available to all.

This experiment has been tried successfully in West Bengal, where numerous community-run libraries exist, catering to all age groups. I also call upon schools to spend more on their libraries so that the habit of reading can be inculcated among children in their formative years.

I would also like to urge Indian publishers to invest more in publishing books written in all Indian languages. There are fine authors who write in Indian languages and greater effort is called for to make their work available to readers from other regions.

Simultaneously, efforts should be made to translate their work into English so that a larger number of people, both in India and abroad, have access to their books. Once again this is an area where publishers can, and should, play a significant role.

I thank the organizers of the 14th World Book Fair for this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you. I wish publishers, authors, and booksellers a successful gathering at this fair.

The Second World Bhojpuri Conference

I AM IMMENSELY delighted to address the Bhojpuri scholars and literateurs assembled on the happy occasion of the Second World Bhojpuri Conference in Mauritius. It was my desire to participate in this conference but considering my other important responsibilities, I am reaching you through this message, which gives me great pleasure. I wish the conference all success.

Great similarities exist between the history of India and Mauritius—their language, literature, folk-culture and civilization. As you are aware, most of the Maurtians had originally come to settle here from Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar whose mother tongue was Bhojpuri. Besides, 52 years

Free rendering of the message in Hindi to the Second World Bhojpuri Conference, Mauritius, 24 February 2000

ago when India attained freedom, there was a strong movement in Mauritius for independence as well and finally it succeeded in eliminating imperialism, leading to the emergence of Mauritius as a free nation. The relations between India and Mauritius are extremely cordial and intimate. Our relations are based on ancient folk-culture, civilization, way of life and language.

Bhojpuri has linked India with several countries of the world. People from India have gone to many parts of the world for centuries. Most of them had descended from the Bhojpuris. They established themselves in far-off countries through their courage and valiant approach. The Bhojpuri language has played a pivotal role in spreading Indian civilization and culture overseas. Whether it is Mauritius or South Africa, Surinam or Trinidad and Tobago or the Federal Republic of Guyana—everywhere the Bhojpuris have upheld their culture and ethos through struggle and have carved out a distinguished place for themselves.

While the Bhojpuris have adapted themselves to the local societies wherever they landed, but at the same time they could preserve their language and culture. The festival of Shivratri, for example, is celebrated in Mauritius with great enthusiasm. Other communities also participate in it with great religious fervour.

The Bhojpuri language has largely contributed to the growth of local customs and festivals in whichever country its speakers have settled. Bhojpuri serves as a common bridge among the people of Indian origin living in different countries by fostering mutual love and intimacy of relationship. The conference is a direct outcome of this fact. I exhort you to formulate such programmes and schemes through this conference which could enable Bhojpuri to keep the Indian culture alive not only in Mauritius but in the entire world. May it prosper and spread the message of love and peace.

Once again, I wish all success to the World Bhojpuri Conference and compliment its organizers.

VI

Health and Social Welfare

Empowerment of Women— From *Abala* to *Sabala*

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to attend this workshop on Economic Empowerment of Women organized by the Delhi Commission for Women.

The very subject of the workshop shows the strange and worrying contradiction between the truth and reality about women in our society. The Indian philosophy and tradition regard woman to be an embodiment of Shakti or Power. Yet, today we are having to talk about empowerment of women.

Similarly, as far as productive economic activity goes, women contribute as much, if not more, as men. They make this contribution both as silent, unrecognized workers at home and also in various capacities in public life. Yet, today we are having to talk about economic empowerment of women.

According to an estimate, women put in two-thirds of the working hours, but get only one tenth the income, and own only one hundredth the resources. The figures given by Shrimati Ghatate bear this out.

A Government of India report in 1995 says that in one area of the Himalayas, on one hectare of farm, a man works 1,212 hours in a year. A pair of bullocks works for 1,064 hours. And a woman works for 3,485 hours! Yet, the report also reveals that most husbands regard their wives as non-workers.

This contradiction of how *Sabala* has become *Abala* is most glaring in poorer sections of our society. A poor woman is in double trouble; first for being poor, and second for being a woman.

Speech at the workshop on Economic Empowerment of Women, New Delhi,
9 April 1999

Economic empowerment is, therefore, the most fundamental pre-requisite in any mission for the all-round liberation of women.

Economic empowerment is critical, because women can then stand on their own feet and not be dependent on men for their income.

Along with economic empowerment, we need educational empowerment, social empowerment, and political empowerment for women.

My Government is committed to all three.

As all of you are aware, we have made our commitment to political empowerment of women widely known. We have already introduced in Parliament a Bill for reserving 33 percent seats for women in the Lok Sabha and in State legislatures. This revolutionary measure is already working very well in Panchayats and local self-governments. If the Opposition supports us, we could pass this Bill even in the forthcoming session of Parliament.

I personally believe that this revolutionary step in affirmative action should not be put off beyond the last year of this century. I once again appeal to all the political parties for support to make this commitment a reality.

Reducing poverty among women, however, cannot come by Government action alone, although governmental commitment is crucial for the success of this mission. Non-governmental organizations have to make an equal contribution. Indeed, both the Government and NGOs have to work together for achieving tangible results.

Over the years, both the Central and State Governments have drawn up a number of programmes and schemes for the economic upliftment of women. Information about these programmes and schemes does not normally reach their intended beneficiaries. Often, even NGOs do not know sufficiently about them.

Therefore, this Directory of Major Schemes and Programmes for Empowerment of Women is a very good idea. It will provide a single window for all available and useful information that NGOs, colleges, and social workers can use. I congratulate the Delhi Commission for Women for publishing the directory.

Now that this directory is available, it will mean an increase in the queries and demands on Government by different NGOs. The Government staff must work courteously and in partnership with those who come to them so that our joint goal of effective implementation of the schemes will be achieved.

Women in predominantly urban areas like Delhi have more opportunities to work. However, these opportunities are not an unmixed blessing. For, along with more openings for economic activity, the unplanned growth of Delhi has also opened up newer problems for women.

Women need a good transportation system to allow them to move out from where they stay to their place of work. The absence of crime, especially against women, is another factor that facilitates more women to work out of their homes. Ensuring these is primarily the duty of the Government—the one in New Delhi and also the one in Delhi.

At the same time, teaching marketable skills and giving women the confidence to use them are primarily the tasks of NGOs. The latter also have a major role to play in running creches and schools, so that mothers can send their children to study and play while they work. It is the duty of the Government to extend all possible help to NGOs engaged in this noble work.

I believe that, in addition to the Government agencies and NGOs, there is a third important category of organizations for achieving rapid economic empowerment of women. And these are women's cooperatives and self-help groups. They can help in production, distribution, and marketing of goods and services. They are also ideally placed to promote training and

skill-development of women, so that their products and services can compete successfully in the marketplace.

We have several success stories in India in the field of women's cooperatives. The Lijjat Papad experiment in Maharashtra is one of them. The commendable work being done by SEWA in Gujarat is another example. In Kerala, the Kudumbasree programme has shown how women's self-help groups at the grassroots level promote their economic as well as political empowerment.

At the national level, we have excellent schemes in the form of the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh. It supports a large network of local self-help groups of poor women. Providing timely and adequate levels of micro-credit is one of the surest ways of improving the economic condition of self-employed women and small women entrepreneurs.

At the same time, they also need technical and marketing skills, and an outlet for their production. Therefore, ensuring a guaranteed market for their products and services is equally important. It seems to me that there is great merit in the demand that all Government agencies should purchase a certain quota of products which they regularly need from certified women's cooperatives. The Centre and the State Governments should evolve a uniform policy on this matter.

We have a lot of work ahead of us to ensure that all our sisters and mothers who can work, have an opportunity to do so; and who do work have an opportunity to earn what they deserve. I am confident that, with the cooperation of Government, semi-Government, and Non-Government agencies working in partnership with poor women, we can quickly achieve this goal.

I extend my best wishes to the Delhi Commission for Women and others, and I urge them to build on the good work of this workshop.

Health Care for the North-East

I AM PLEASSED to visit the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal and to inaugurate its newly constructed auditorium.

Manipur is on the move. The progress is still not as rapid as you or I would like it to be. Yet, I see that things are changing positively on the developmental front, and that is a good sign.

The organization of the 5th National Games here in Imphal has proved to be a major milestone in the integration of the North-East into the national mainstream. Sports is an important index of physical fitness, general health and even regional and national pride. Recently, the airport in Imphal has been modernized and I was happy to see its new and typically Manipuri architecture.

With the inauguration of this beautiful auditorium of the RIMS today, we are adding yet another attainment that brings pride to Manipuris and to all of us. I would like conscious efforts to be made to organise national and international medical conferences in this auditorium on a regular basis.

RIMS, which is patterned after the AIIMS in New Delhi, is already one of the best medical institutions in the North-East. I am sure that in the years to come this Institute would become one of the National Centres of Excellence in the medical field.

Friends, among the most important tasks of any government, one is to ensure the health of all its citizens. A strong and healthy nation can be built only when both the preventive and the curative health needs of all the people of all the regions are met.

Speech while inaugurating the auditorium of the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal, 21 May 1999

The present regional imbalance in the healthcare infrastructure needs to be remedied without any delay. This matter is of particular urgency in the North-East, which also suffers from physical isolation from the rest of the country due to underdeveloped communication infrastructure in the region. My Government is fully committed to removing both the physical and developmental distance between the North-East and the rest of India.

The Regional Institute of Medical Sciences is an important part of the curative health infrastructure of six States that are jointly running it with the Central Government. For not only is it a big and specialized hospital, it is also a first-class training institute for doctors. The addition of hundred well-trained doctors every year in this region is a vital contribution in the fight for better healthcare.

I understand that up to ninety percent of the community health centres, which are the first referral centres, could not be provided with specialists. The post-graduate specialists that pass out of RIMS are, therefore, helping to plug the big gap in the healthcare system due to a lack of specialists.

Compared with several States of India, the North-East has a better record in both male and female literacy. This has helped significantly in relatively better accomplishments in healthcare, as is seen by the lower infant mortality rates in this region.

In addition, we have seen that satisfactory results are achieved whenever the State Governments have acted with a sense of purpose. For instance, 41 percent of the 1,100 malarial deaths in the country in 1994 came from the North-Eastern states. Three years later, thanks to vigorous governmental and non-governmental efforts, only nine persons died of this dreaded disease.

However, the challenges in the field of healthcare are far more than our achievements so far. Of late, we are facing newer and more formidable challenges. For example, the

dreaded scourge of AIDS, and its related devil, tuberculosis, are striking hard throughout this region. Many young men, in the prime of their lives, are becoming victims of HIV-AIDS. Since there is no cure for AIDS, prevention is the only way.

Last year in December, I had tried to alert the country to the danger of AIDS, which I had said was the most serious public health challenge for the country. This is coming true for the North-East. In that speech I had also said, "We in India need to relentlessly search for an anti-HIV vaccine as a task of high priority and urgency. In the meantime, we all will have to bring out the best in each one of us by way of compassion, understanding, and love for those who are afflicted and already affected. India can do no less."

I understand that unlike elsewhere in India, here in the North-East, and in Manipur specially, drug use is the primary cause for AIDS. Therefore, our fight against drug addiction and smuggling of narcotics has to be an integral part of our war against AIDS.

In planning and implementing our health programmes, I cannot overemphasize the need for promoting low-cost, preventive, and indigenous systems of medicine such as Ayurveda, naturopathy, and others. The people of North-East have, over the centuries, developed many effective home-grown healthcare practices. Owing to its rich bio-diversity, this region is also famous for a large number of herbs and medicinal plants.

The whole world is now turning to nature-friendly healthcare products and practices. The global market for such products and practices is rapidly increasing. I would, therefore, like the medical community to intensify its R&D and promotional activities in this field.

I am given to understand that major proposals for the development of RIMS are presently under the consideration of concerned authorities. I assure the people of Manipur and the North-East that the Centre would grant necessary sanctions

during the current financial year itself.

I wish the Director, the teaching and non-teaching staff and students of this Institute all success in the coming years. Together, let all of us resolve to build a healthy and happy society for the people of Manipur, other North-Eastern States, and all of India.

Empowering Women Benefits All

I AM BOTH pleased and privileged to be here today to felicitate Dr. Mohammad Yunus, the deserving recipient of the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament, and Development for 1998.

This prestigious award honours those outstanding global citizens who have made a significant contribution to humanity's material and cultural progress. It commemorates Shrimati Indira Gandhi, who was herself, an outstanding international personality of her time. Presenting this award on her birth anniversary is a fitting way to remember her spirited espousal of world peace, disarmament, and issues vital to the developing countries.

Several worthy men and women have received this prize since it was instituted in 1985. Among them have been heads of State and Government, as also individuals and organizations that have championed many humanitarian causes, including those of democracy and development.

Dr. Yunus, however, stands out as unique among the

Speech at the function to present the 1998 Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development, New Delhi, 19 November 1999

recipients of the Indira Gandhi Award. His lifelong work has added an important new dimension—one that has so far, sadly, been neglected—to the developmental effort in the world. He, and the organization that he heads, are one of the few that have elevated grassroots rural progress to the centre-stage of the developmental debate. Moreover, going beyond academic debate, they have actually proved that grassroots development is possible—given the right vision, the organization that has turned that vision into its mission, and the leader who embodies both the vision and the mission. Dr. Yunus has provided that superior kind of leadership to the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. The bank's recent foray into rural mobile telecommunications is yet another example of its chairman's modern approach wedded to the welfare of the masses.

I congratulate the jury for selecting him for the award. By doing so, they have made their own contribution to the cause of development without imbalances and distortions. At a time when globalization is increasing the centralization of financial services to meet largely metropolitan needs, this successful experiment in rural banking has taken micro-credit and other services to villages. It has shown that bank lending to very small borrowers can indeed, be viable through the mechanism of self-help groups. I am happy to note that the pioneering efforts of Dr. Yunus have been successfully replicated in many parts of India and elsewhere in the world.

Intimately and integrally linked to grassroots, rural development is the need for women's socio-economic empowerment. And here, too, the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh has shown the way. Women in traditional societies like India and Bangladesh—indeed, women all over the world—are amazing agents of development. The term "sustainable development", which so powerfully engages the minds of policy-makers, administrators and intellectuals around the world, invariably comes alive when we make women the active participants in, and beneficiaries of, all our developmental efforts.

When women are economically and educationally empowered, the beneficiaries are not women alone. Rather, they transmit many tangible and intangible benefits to the family, the community, the nation, and the entire human race.

By re-orienting banking with a focus on villages and women, Dr. Yunus, and the many people he has inspired around the developing world, are, indeed redefining development to mean progress of the poor and disadvantaged.

Work for a New Social Order

IT IS BOTH a pleasure and a privilege to inaugurate this three-day convention of parliamentarians belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Last month marked the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Constitution of India. Next month we will be celebrating 50 years of our Republic that was founded on the noble principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity that form the soul of the Constitution.

Standing at this milestone of our post-Independence history, it would be worthwhile to take stock of how far we have been able to realize the goals of social equality and social harmony. And, to chart the course for the new century that dawns upon us in another three weeks so that we can create a truly egalitarian society.

One of the instruments, provided in the Constitution to ensure equality for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,

Speech while inaugurating the Convention of the Members of Parliament belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, New Delhi, 5 December 1999

who suffered denial and marginalization for centuries, was political reservations. It was supposed to help remove discrimination and deprivation through political empowerment.

To a great extent, this instrument has served its purpose and my government, therefore, has extended political reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for another ten years.

I am aware that the operational guidelines issued by the Ministry of Personnel regarding reservation in government jobs have created some discontent among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These guidelines were issued by the then government after certain pronouncements of the Supreme Court.

I would like to inform you all that, in pursuance of my assurance to Parliament, this government has already taken steps for reviewing the guidelines. In respect of the following two aspects, the proposals for constitutional amendments are at the final stage of consideration:

Relaxing the existing requirements by prescribing lower qualifying marks and standards for promotion in respect of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe employees; and,

Clearing the backlog of jobs through special recruitment in respect of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes quota.

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been consulted on these two aspects. The Commission has expressed its appreciation of the proposed amendments.

The Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, in a recent judgment, has reiterated earlier judgments regarding the principle of fixation of seniority on promotion of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe employees. My government proposes to bring about a Constitutional amendment to restore the

seniority principle that was prevalent prior to these judgments. I would like to reiterate that we are committed to protecting the interests of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe employees. Operational guidelines will not be allowed to stand in the way.

Apart from political and job reservations a lot still remains to be done for improving the lot of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for which we should all make a concerted effort. This convention, I am sure, will identify issues, as well as generate ideas on how to make rapid progress towards equitable development and a society free of social discrimination.

As you are aware, though Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes constitute around a quarter of India's population; their development index leaves much to be desired. This, despite vast allocations over several Plan periods. Obviously, something was lacking in the policies and programmes of the last fifty years.

A quick survey of the present scenario will tell us that in spite of fifty years of development effort, most of our Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe brothers and sisters continue to remain landless agricultural labourers and marginal farmers.

Equally painful is the fact that there is high incidence of child labour among Scheduled Castes and that untouchability is still practised against them in rural areas. Both are an assault on human dignity and a negation of the very principle of equality.

There are other problems too, that confronts the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in their day-to-day life.

Women still do not get paid stipulated minimum wages in some parts of the country. Due to illiteracy, awareness of Government programmes is still very poor. Some of them do not get ration cards because they migrate from one place to another in search of livelihood. Those given vocational training

do not have access to markets.

Many of these problems can be solved through education. Literacy is a powerful instrument of reform and development. The first step towards this is universalizing primary education. We have already taken several initiatives in this regard.

For tribals, land, forest, and water are intimately linked with their lives. I am aware that in spite of laws designed to protect their land, alienation is still a problem, as is restoration of land. We have to consider ways and means to make tribal land inalienable. Similarly, we need to conserve our forests as they sustain tribals. The time has come to review the National Forest Policy and study the implications of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. However, our approach cannot be uniform for the entire country. Forest policy in tribal areas has to be distinct from forest policy in non-tribal areas.

My government is seized of the fact that there is scarcity of drinking water in some tribal areas. One of our priorities is to provide clean drinking water and we will soon formulate a strategy and implement it in a time-bound manner. I will myself monitor this programme. Women play a significant role in tribal society; let us empower them with skills and assets and they will then become engines of development within their respective communities. To look into these issues and further focus attention on development of tribals, my government has set up a separate Ministry for Tribal Affairs.

I am aware that malnutrition, diarrhoea among children in rural areas, lack of immunization, and prevalence of infant and child mortality are common among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Lack of maternal care, poor intake of nutrients and undernourishment are due to poverty, ignorance, and lack of hygiene. Both the central and state governments can play a proactive role to combat these problems. The central government, on its part, needs to review the impact of various schemes and bring about necessary changes so that they are

more effective.

It is extremely painful that many of those belonging to Scheduled Castes continue to be victims of social ostracism and untouchability. To effectively fight this crime, we need to encourage attitudinal changes. One way of doing this would be to identify and reward villages and panchayats that are free from the evil of untouchability. The Dr. Ambedkar Foundation could take a lead in this direction.

Among Scheduled Castes, the most vulnerable people are those who are engaged in scavenging. Our past efforts to help them have failed. Now we need to have a Mission Mode approach with the aim of abolishing the inhuman practice of carrying night-soil as headload. Simultaneously, we need to identify alternative occupation for them. I would urge each MP to adopt one village or town and join us in this national task.

Most of our parliamentarians present here have long experience and have been in the service of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for considerable time. I am sure you will give constructive suggestions so that we can collectively work towards a new social order in the new century — a social order that is based on *samajik samata* (social equality) and *samajik samrasata* (social harmony).

It has been a privilege sharing some of my thoughts with you. I am sure this convention will make a substantive contribution to the cause of empowering Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Comprehensive Strategies Needed for Tobacco Control

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to inaugurate the International Conference on Global Tobacco Control Law.

This conference can assume significance on two counts. First, by aiming to focus international attention on a core issue of public health in countries across the world. Second, by seeking to formulate a comprehensive strategy for tobacco control from the developing world's perspective.

I need hardly emphasize that without the effective involvement of developing countries, there cannot be any meaningful outcome of efforts, like this conference, to regulate and control global tobacco consumption.

Tobacco-related health hazards have now been scientifically established. Studies show that tobacco is the main cause of, or a major contributor to, more than 25 diseases, including cancer and heart attack.

According to the World Health Organization, the annual death toll attributable to tobacco will rise from its current estimate of four million a year to ten million by 2025. We are concerned by the projection that more than seventy percent of these deaths will occur in developing countries. India has specifically taken note of the WHO projection that this country will experience the highest rate of increase in tobacco-related deaths over the next two decades.

The consequences of the harm caused by tobacco, however, go beyond these grim statistics. Many of tobacco's victims could die or suffer disability in mid-life, devastating their families and depriving society of their productive contribution.

Speech while inaugurating the WHO sponsored International Conference on Global Tobacco Control Law, New Delhi, 7 January 2000

At another level, public health spending would have to be diverted to technology intensive and financially expensive health care that tobacco related-diseases demand.

This bodes ill for developing economies.

For, the cumulative social and economic costs will impede growth and development. Governments, especially those of the developing countries, thus need to look beyond quick revenue generation from the sale of tobacco-related products.

Countries like India have to deal with the use of tobacco on a much wider scale.

National surveys indicate that more than a hundred million people are addicted to chewing tobacco in our country, of which 36 million are women and 17 million are aged below 25 years. We need to consider how to prevent access to tobacco products to young people.

The trends of tobacco use in developed countries are different from those in developing countries. Developed nations have been witnessing a steady decline in tobacco consumption. Consequently, their production surplus has been aggressively seeking external markets. Developing countries, on the other hand, are experiencing rising tobacco consumption and shrinking export markets.

Here I wish to point out that liberalization of international trade has contributed to this difference in consumption patterns. International trade agreements in recent years have liberalized trade in many goods. Cigarettes are no exception.

According to a study reported by the World Bank, the consumption of cigarettes per person in four Asian economies that opened their markets in response to U. S. trade pressure during the 1980s, was almost ten percent higher in 1991 than it would have been if these markets had remained closed. The conclusion is clear: easy access to external markets for cigarette manufacturers in developed countries has contributed significantly to increases in cigarette consumption in low and

middle-income countries.

These patterns are fraught with grave consequences for the health of current and future generations in developing countries. The imperatives of public health action for tobacco control, therefore, cannot be denied or delayed.

On my part, I would like to reaffirm my Government's commitment to protect our people from the ill effects of tobacco.

However, it would be unrealistic to view tobacco purely as a health problem and ignore the economic and social fall-outs of tobacco control. It is necessary for the developed countries to address and allay the apprehensions of developing countries about the adverse effects that tobacco control may have on their economies.

For instance, India is the third largest producer of tobacco in the world. About one million Indians are engaged in tobacco cultivation. More than eighty percent of the tobacco smoked in India is in the form of bidis that are manufactured by cottage units, which provide employment to 4.5 million people. Similarly, majority of the units manufacturing paan masala and gutka are in the small-scale sector. The annual turnover of the paan masala industry is around Rs. 1,000 crore and this sector, too, employs a large workforce.

Therefore, we have to bear in mind the employment and livelihood of the large numbers engaged in tobacco cultivation and production. Any curbs on tobacco consumption have to be necessarily accompanied by measures to protect their household income.

Developing countries, thus, need the assistance of international agencies and developed countries for agricultural and industrial diversification projects to protect those who depend on cultivating and processing tobacco for their livelihood. If we do not conceive of tobacco control as a comprehensive package, our attempts at intervention may become self-defeating.

Madame Director-General, no one is better placed than you to understand these national and global complexities. We are confident that your experience and vision will help in formulating an effective strategy that does not hinge on law alone for tobacco control.

True, legislative measures have a special place in such a strategy. But legislation cannot be effective in isolation. For a tobacco control law to be successfully implemented it must be accompanied by alternative modes of income for those dependent on tobacco and the community at large has to be fully informed and involved.

The media, with its vast outreach and power to influence public opinion, can become a valuable partner in informing people about the impact of tobacco on health and mobilizing community support for curbs on consumption. Schools can play a contributory role by encouraging children, especially teenagers, to say "No" to tobacco. Our recent success in involving students to raise public awareness about the need to check environmental pollution shows that children are effective change agents in their families and communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at the dawn of the 21st century, we are only too aware that we will witness an increasingly integrated world in the years to come. In an open world economy, tobacco trade has become transnational. Satellite television overrides domestic bans on advertising tobacco products.

The only way this can be controlled is through international legislation governing the use of all media, whether electronic or print, to promote the use of tobacco products. The World Health Organization's efforts to initiate and advance a Framework Convention on Tobacco Control are welcome in this regard.

I would like to congratulate you, Madame Director-General, for embarking on this global mission.

But, if tobacco control has to succeed as a global mission,

our commitment must be complete, action must be universal, strategies must be comprehensive and integrated, and implementation must be phased and progressive.

Tobacco control must be seen to confer on the people the riches of good health, while advancing the health of the economy.

This perspective of the developing countries should be reflected in the global agenda for tobacco control. If this conference succeeds in building a consensus that can unite developed and developing nations on adopting a common approach towards tobacco control, it will mark a major milestone.

I wish you all success in your deliberations. And, I thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Brave Children— Nation's Pride

EVERY YEAR WE felicitate the brave children on the eve of the Republic Day. This time we are honouring 15 children. I am confident that this number will go up further. We are one billion now. There is no dearth of brave children among them. But to spot them and to bring them to the Centre's notice is rather a difficult task. I would like that some more time be devoted to this job and more information obtained on them. Getting feedback from all over the country is no doubt a difficult job. Still, it is also necessary that information relating to the courage, valour and gallantry of children be publicized all over the country. There is a proposal that this function

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi while presenting the Bravery Awards to children, New Delhi, 24 January 2000

should be held at some bigger venue, say a school, where they could know that such an award exists to honour children. The children should increasingly participate in them and they should be inspired to perform similar acts so as to get the bravery awards.

I admit that holding a function at the Prime Minister's residence has its own significance. But, the number of participants is very small here. Some schools in Delhi can be selected by rotation and the events for which these brave children are awarded, can be dramatized and staged. This ceremony can be given a different format. I do not mean that such functions should not be held at my residence. But it will be better if they are organized elsewhere for Prime Ministers do keep on changing. But this place is secure and there is no need to worry about it. However, other children should also know about their heroic deeds. Courage, fearlessness and resolve are virtues without which no human being can succeed in one's life. We all live for ourselves. But to live for others, living by helping others and, above all, protecting others even at the cost of one's own life are far greater virtues.

It is a natural instinct to save someone from drowning in the river. This is a natural virtue for man. It is his inherent virtue because everyone has a common soul. Sometimes one also has to think as to how to help someone in distress. The limbs instantly get activated and they react accordingly. But there are also instances where more than saving someone it is essential to take a calculated risk to one's own life. We do come across such children. Knowingly, they put their own life in jeopardy. Here also, a child has been awarded for a similar act of bravery. If imbibed from childhood this trait may come in handy not only in dangerous situations but also in self-defence and also while defending others. Helping others is a duty, nothing else can excel.

A function like this to felicitate children have been held for several years now. I do not know if there is any other programme of this nature elsewhere in the country. Hence, the

importance of a function like this goes up. This is why I have suggested that an event like this should be organized in such a way that maximum number of children may derive inspiration from it. Here only the children selected for the awards have come. Some of their relations may also have come. No doubt, these children will certainly be taken out on elephants at the Republic Day parade. The other children will ask with curiosity who are the ones being carried on elephants. It would then be announced that they are the ones who risked their lives to save others. You will be felicitated and you deserve to be honoured. But the virtues to save others in distress and doing selfless service should be developed inherently. It is a divine quality that deifies the human beings.

In ancient times, children were taught the lesson of fearlessness in our country. The mothers used to impart fearlessness in their children. You may have seen pictures and statues where Shakuntala's son, Bharat, is shown counting a lion's teeth. But such depictions are confined only to paintings and sculptures. Now, the very mention of the word "lion" creates terror. But if someone faces the lion without fear, it does not act viciously. People say those who are fearful, only embolden the lion to attack. If a man is not scared too much, it is the lion which fears him the most. Man is the deadliest creature on earth. Neither it is the lion nor the snake. But it is the name that creates fear. In dark even a rope looks like a snake. In reality, it is only a rope. But in dark one cannot see and gets intimidated by it. It is said that people do not actually die because of snake bite but out of fear. He thinks, alas! I have been bitten by snake and cannot survive now. I would certainly die. But die for what? You must survive, struggle in life valiantly and protect others. This should be the motto. The Republic Day gives us this message.

I compliment all of you, children. I wish you continue doing similar heroic deeds in your life and keep getting awards. Good wishes to you. I am grateful to the Bal Kalyan Parishad (Council for Children's Welfare) for organizing this function and inviting me here.

Voluntary Efforts for Social Development

I AM GREATLY delighted to participate in this national convention on voluntary efforts and social development. First of all, I welcome and felicitate all the workers of voluntary organizations active in different fields who have assembled here from various states.

Voluntary organizations have a pivotal role in social development. They are the tireless hands working for national developments. Hence, we are with you. I can assure you that there will never be any lack of political will in promoting voluntary efforts.

We have a glorious tradition of voluntary efforts in our country. Efforts to organize basic facilities for the people by and large through voluntary efforts have been coming down in our country since ancient times. Service to humanity is service to God. This concept symbolizes our culture.

In villages and towns works of public importance have been executed through voluntary efforts, no matter whether these works related to the construction of chaupals i.e. the village assembly, inns, wells and ponds. In times of natural calamities joint voluntary efforts must have been a worth-watching spectacle. That tradition continues till today. During the recent super cyclone in Orissa the relief supplies organized through voluntary efforts is an example of that glorious tradition.

India's history bears testimony to the fact that the tradition of voluntary work has always been associated with measures

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi while inaugurating the National Convention on Voluntary Efforts and Social Development, New Delhi, 22 February 2000

of social reform. The process of social reform in India began in the later part of the 19th century. It is well known that voluntary efforts were at the root of that process. Reformers like Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Maharshi Karve jolted the inert community through their voluntary efforts. They inspired the people to achieve something concrete in life. They acted as catalysts in giving a new energy and momentum to the process of social development.

The entire national movement in India is an example as to how countless people selflessly contributed their mite to it with full dedication inspired by their conscience. Mahatma Gandhi even made social service an inseparable part of the freedom movement. Social service became a pre-requisite of patriotism. In fact, these were two mainstreams of the national movement. While one led the path to freedom from slavery, the other drew towards social independence and equality through constructive work.

The voluntary efforts under Gandhiji's leadership during the national movement were multi-dimensional. Whether it was eradication of untouchability or spreading literacy through the new method of education, prevention of leprosy or cleanliness—Gandhiji inspired thousands of volunteers to take up these jobs. His greatest contribution was to remove the widespread sense of depression among the neglected and deprived sections of the society, which enabled them to join the national mainstream. Along side, he also began different constructive movements. The purpose of these creative movements on the one hand was to establish the dignity of labour and to create a feeling of self-esteem on the other. This is where the spirit of Swadeshi originated and grew strong. The debilitating social customs got weakened. Constructive thinking developed in place of the conservative outlook. All these voluntary efforts set off a new chain of activity. Gandhiji's creative movement led to an unprecedented growth of the spirit of service. The people in general developed a fellow

feeling towards the deprived, depressed and neglected ones.

After independence and especially in the last few decades, there has been a multi-dimensional extension of voluntary efforts. This led to the growth of professional outlook. A process of research evaluation, survey and analysis started. This is an age of professionalism. Hence, there will be no harm if voluntary organizations also develop professionalism. But if on account of this the spirit of service decreases and there is too much emphasis on profession or if service becomes merely a profession, then we should sense that there is something wrong somewhere. Because of professional outlook the practical application of the spirit of service should not get blunted. If there is a synthesis between professional outlook and the creativity that developed during our freedom movement, then it will be very useful and meaningful and relevant from the viewpoint of social development.

Despite many handicaps, several voluntary organizations are even now working in many parts of the country. They are least concerned whether anyone is recognizing their work or not. They are neither after any award nor do they have any aspiration to get something in return. They are actively involved in service moved by the sufferings of the society. To ensure that the benefits of their service actually reaches the last person in society is their only goal.

The government wants to encourage such voluntary efforts. We request such organizations to lend a helping hand in formulating and implementing our programmes and policies. By involving themselves through participation in Government sponsored programmes, those sections of society will benefit for whom they are really meant. In this way not only the credibility of the Government sponsored programmes will go up but the people will also develop faith in the voluntary agencies. The delay in implementation of the programmes will end.

It is our endeavour to speed up the process of social

development through voluntary organizations. The Government all along tried to enlist the voluntary organizations in supplementing the Government's welfare schemes. Where the voluntary organizations demand transparency in Government work the Government also expects the same transparency in all that they do. Through mutual transparency a new phase of cooperation and coordination will begin. We want that the voluntary organizations should also point out the Government's shortcomings in a constructive manner wherever necessary, and suggest ways and also cooperate in removing the shortcomings. Only then we can build a society, which was visualized during the national movement.

There is no doubt that the Central Social Welfare Board has done a significant job in making voluntary agencies act as catalysts of social development in independent India. It has imparted dynamism to all voluntary efforts. I am happy that Shrimati Mridula Sinha has given a new momentum to the Social Development Board. For this the Government is determined to further empower the Central Social Welfare Board. The Government will help the Social Welfare Board in every possible way to enable it enhance the credibility of voluntary organizations among the people.

I am glad to inaugurate this important national convention. I am confident that this will be a milestone in strengthening cooperation between the Government and voluntary organisations.

Political Empowerment Must for Women's Progress

I AM GLAD to participate in this programme to mark the International Women's Day today on March 8. International Women's Day is an occasion when women of every country in the world feel a sense of unity, bound by a common sisterly feeling. But this day is not meant only for our sisters and mothers. It is also relevant for men because the reasons for which it is observed internationally are associated with them. If the women have not got equal status vis-à-vis men, if even today they are victims of gender discrimination, exploitation, injustice and tyranny, then the fault lies with our social system in whose evolution and continuance men have been more responsible.

This reality is confined not only to India or some other countries alone. Rather it is a deep rooted phenomenon all over the world where the females get a secondary position in the male-dominated society. This is why there has been a vigorous awareness among women in countries all around the globe in the last few decades to change this social order based on inequality and injustice.

This is an age of globalization. But if this process of globalization is restricted to economic sphere alone then I think it will give only a one-sided benefit to the society. However, it is a matter of satisfaction that women-awakening is also gaining grounds all over the world. This awakening and collective consciousness is called International Women's Day. Various programmes being held within the country and all over the world only reflect this consciousness. I hail this consciousness and hope that in its brilliance all anti-women traditions and

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi while inaugurating the International Women's Day function, New Delhi, 8 March 2000

customs will vanish.

For us equality and respect for women are no alien concepts. There is the fundamental ethos of the Indian culture. It is not a mere coincidence that the deities of wealth, knowledge and power in our Indian culture are women—Lakshmi, Saraswati and Shakti.

After Independence the constitution gave the women all those rights to which they were entitled. At every level they were provided guarantees of equality and security against injustice and exploitation. In a short span of time their presence began to be felt in every sphere of social development. A new process of development began in the country. By virtue of their commitment, competence and intelligence the women proved that only because they were kept out of its mainstream the country remained backward. Once the barriers were removed and they got the opportunities, women began to provide a new



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the inauguration of the International Women's Day function, New Delhi, 8 March 2000

philosophy of development, whether they were in the abyss or on top of the social order. These achievements have not come their way because of any concessions but through sheer determination, hard work and courage.

The Government is paying special attention to the poor and weaker sections of society. We are giving the highest priority to human resource development through education, health and other programmes of social service and related policies. This shows our commitment to women's development and their empowerment.

It is a present-day need to enable women have access to the national resources and to ensure their rightful place in the mainstream of economic development. To achieve this goal the Government would set up a working group under an expert to review all the existing provisions. This task force will help us in checking out special programmes for celebrating 2001 as the year of Women's Empowerment. By dedicating the year 2001 to Women's Empowerment all hurdles coming in their way would be decisively removed. Efforts will be intensified to bring about social change by spreading all round consciousness among them.

Women's Empowerment has a very deep and wide implication. To empower women we will have to take big steps in the economic, political and social fields. In the last fifty years some efforts were made in this direction but we cannot rest content with these.

The administration has a key role in women's empowerment. My Government has taken some steps in this direction and still wants to do more. One of the important measures is political empowerment of women. Because of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution, one third of the seats in gram panchayats have been reserved for women. Our experience so far shows that by increasing the representation of women in gram panchayats, zila panchayats and municipal

bodies excellent results have been achieved. This has not only aroused new confidence among women but the working of these institutions has also improved. As a result, an extensive network of women workers and leaders has come up in the local autonomous bodies.

Friends, sometimes news reports are published saying that reservation of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions has not succeeded and that women cannot discharge their responsibilities properly. There might have been one or two instances. But I do not know for sure whether or not that has happened. No one can object wherever a wife takes the help of her husband in running a Panchayat. We also appoint advisors. If the wife employs her husband only for advising her who can have any grouse? But this seems to have created an impression that the woman is an object of pity and that responsibilities have been forcibly thrust on her. She cannot run the institution to which she has been elected and her husband somehow manages the show. This concept is not correct. This experiment is growing and succeeding very well. There is no alternative to the system.

Now the time has come to increase the representation of women in central and state administrations. If women can do good work in Panchayats and Zila Parishads, why not in the State Assemblies and Parliament as well? They are doing. But their number is small. It should increase. Today they are very few in the State Legislatures and Parliament but despite their small numbers many women members have performed very well on account of their competence and ability. In this context, I remember the late Geeta Mukherjee. She was an MP for a long time. Besides raising questions relating to women's issues, she used to actively pursue different questions within Parliament and outside as well. When I recall Geeta Mukherjee and other women MPs like her, I like their qualities, which raised the stature and competence of Parliament. Hence, I am confident, if there is one third reservation for women in Parliament, then

not only they will get their rightful representation which has been denied to them so far, but our democratic system would also become healthier and strong.

I would appeal to all political parties on the occasion of the International Women's Day that they support and quickly pass the Bill introduced by my Government in Parliament so as to confer statutory political empowerment on women.

Besides political empowerment, there is also a need to bring about rapid changes in economic, social and educational fields. The Government alone cannot do the job. The Government, non-government organizations and women's organizations have to come forward by joining hands and with determination to make collective efforts in this direction.

Several avenues can be created for providing jobs to women in industries and for their self-employment. For this purpose means are no doubt essential. But more than resources what is needed most is mobilization of support for women's economic empowerment. Whenever they have been provided such opportunities the women have taken not only full advantage of it but have also contributed to the betterment of their families and the society. For example, the *Kudumbasree* movement in Kerela has become very popular. Under this, thousands of women set up micro credit, that is, functioning like small banks at the local level. Such an experiment is also going on in Bangladesh very successfully. I am happy to note that NABARD and SIDBI have jointly formulated a scheme to create 1.5 lakh self-help groups in which the women could be given priority. Women working in small and domestic industries will largely benefit from such institutions.

New opportunities are also being created for employing educated women. It is a matter of pride that our educated young women are advancing in the fields of medical science, engineering, management and information technology. I would like that the administration and society should both find out

fresh opportunities for women.

It is necessary for the economic development of women that not only should they be given equal opportunities and rights but also equal pay for equal work in every sphere. This rule is being followed in the Government sector. I would appeal to all to ensure that the Government sector and voluntary agencies should work together to get this rule implemented in the private sector as well.

Girl's education is the corner stone of our nation-building activities. It is regrettable that despite 50 years of our Independence we have lagged far behind in female literacy. Half of the country's women are still illiterate while the male rate of literacy has come down to 35 per cent. Female education is not a question of being linked only with affluence. Its reasons are social taboos and wrong attitudes, which deprive the girl child from education. If they manage to get past the primary level, conservative social beliefs keep the avenues of secondary and higher education out of reach for them. I would like to suggest that a strong social movement be launched against such traditions and customs. Our religious institutions and spiritual leaders can spearhead this movement.

Organizing basic facilities within the home today is the responsibility of women. Provision of drinking water is also one of the problems. Women in the countryside have to toil hard to get drinking water. In many villages they set out to fetch water with pitchers on their heads before the dawn.

Our endeavour is that women must be relieved of this stress. We are making efforts that within the next five years every rural cluster in the country should get safe drinking water. We have set up a new Drinking Water Supply Department in the Ministry of Rural Development. We have set a target in our proposed budget to provide drinking water in sixty thousand villages next year. These efforts are indicative of the government's social commitment, especially towards women. I

support the emancipation of women from every form of exploitation. I am all for harnessing their creative capabilities.

In the end, I would like to say, if we have to really make the 21st century as a century for India, then we will have to awaken women's power.

VII

International Affairs

A Joyous Occasion for Peoples of India and Bangladesh

I AM DELIGHTED to join your Excellency and the distinguished guests present here in welcoming to Dhaka all those who have travelled from India to Bangladesh on the occasion of the inaugural run of the bus service between Calcutta and Dhaka. This is indeed a joyous occasion for people in both countries. This is a service that we have long planned for and today we see it as a reality. For those of you who have made this landmark journey, I am sure, it was a memorable experience. Think for a moment of what your trip today represents!

Every year, a few lakh people cross the border checkpoints between our two countries. Their travel is expensive. The absence of a direct service has meant the travellers have had to walk across the border with their luggage. Today's inaugural run is, I hope, only the beginning of many more such facilities for people in both our countries. Our travellers include students in large numbers, medical patients, business people, pilgrims, tourists, and people who have lived once on the other side of our common border, causing them to travel between Bangladesh and India to enjoy the company and affection of their families and friends. It is my earnest hope that in the years ahead, with the cooperation of the government of Bangladesh similar facilities can be put in place for the many people who wish to travel between other destinations in our two countries. While it is befitting that we have begun the service between Calcutta and Dhaka, there is a lot more that we would love to do to promote road links between our countries.

The start of the service represents one more stage in the active agenda between India and Bangladesh. At the

Speech at a function after the arrival of the first Calcutta-Dhaka bus service,
Dhaka, 19 June 1999

governmental level we deal with many issues big and small which affect the well-being of the people in both our countries. We promote culture, we discuss trade, and we exchange ideas on how to improve border management. We hold meetings and conduct studies on the best ways to handle the rivers that we share. We also discuss problems dealing with narcotic drugs, crimes across the border, law and order, and insurgency. I would like you to know that when we speak of good relations between our two countries, the government of India derives great encouragement from the tremendous amount of interaction that takes place between the peoples of India and Bangladesh.

Many of our problems are similar and much of our heritage is common. Language, literature, music, and art. At the same time, we are two separate, sovereign, independent countries who enjoy the kind of goodwill and understanding by which we are able to settle complex problems through bilateral dialogue. It was this approach that led to the signing of the



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina while launching the first Calcutta-Dhaka bus service, Dhaka, 19 June 1999

historic treaty on the sharing of the Ganga waters. It is our conviction that the same approach of goodwill and friendship will continue to govern the relations between our two countries

Our travellers have spent much of today driving through the Bangladesh countryside. In the month of "Ashad", which brings the monsoon, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore sang wonderfully of how shadows of the clouds of "Ashad" play around the "Kadamba" groves, while the "Piyal" trees swing in the wind and seem to dance, and I quote:

कदम्बेरि कानन घेरी
आषाढ़ मेघेर छाया खेले,
पीयालगुली नाटेर ठाटे
हावाए हेले।

Perhaps in coming years we shall also see more routes and even rail services available to the general public. Whatever the future holds in the areas of these transport linkages, the people of India and Bangladesh will always look back to today's journey and to today's travellers as the ones who started the process. After an early start this morning I know that you will be tired and keen to rest. I am grateful to Her Excellency, the Prime Minister and the Government of Bangladesh for inviting me to Dhaka to join in this wonderful celebration.

India Greatly Values its Relationship with Cambodia

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to welcome Your Excellency and the Members of your Delegation and to wish you a pleasant stay in India.

Speech at the banquet in honour of the Cambodian Prime Minister, Mr. Hun Sen, New Delhi, 18 February 2000

Your Excellency is no stranger to India and is conversant with the history of centuries of trade and commerce, cultural and religious traditions, which bind our countries together. As we enter the third millennium, it is useful to look back and recall that a thousand years ago, the city of Angkor was South East Asia's most important political and commercial centre with which India had deep and abiding civilizational connections.

In recent memory, India and Cambodia have enjoyed friendly, fraternal relations based on trust and mutual respect. The thread of these relations is intertwined with the formation of the Non Aligned Movement, of which His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk continues to provide living testimony although other founding members, such as Jawaharlal Nehru,



*Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee receiving the
Prime Minister of Cambodia, Mr Samdech Hun Sen,
New Delhi, 18 February 2000*

Josep Broz Tito, and Abdul Gamal Nasser have since passed into history.

Excellency, we in India are indeed happy to see that Cambodia has passed quite a few milestones in recent times. After the peaceful and democratic elections of 1998, it has acquired membership of the ASEAN and we hope soon to see it as a member of the WTO. The country has embarked upon a path of securing sustained economic development and under your enlightened and courageous leadership is headed towards achieving higher and still higher standards of living for its people. We understand that the World Bank expects economic growth in Cambodia to reach six percent next year.

The end of the economic crisis in ASEAN countries has provided renewed impetus to our "Look East" policy and we are glad that this has coincided with the entry of Cambodia into the ASEAN family. We value Cambodia's support to India in various projects of the ASEAN and our existing status as a Full Dialogue Partner. The ASEAN Regional Forum is playing a crucial role in promoting dialogue on issues of security and stability in the region as also on nuclear disarmament. India, like Cambodia is committed to the global elimination of all weapons of mass destruction—nuclear, biological, and chemical. We would also like to express our thanks for the understanding and support extended by Cambodia for our standpoints on issues like the CTBT, the NPT, and nuclear disarmament.

Nearer home, India seeks friendly ties with all its neighbouring countries and greater cooperation within the SAARC framework. India is also keen that institutional interaction should occur at a faster pace among regional groupings like BIMSTEC and the IOR-ARC so that developing countries, strengthened through cooperation at regional levels, acquire an increasingly stronger voice in the WTO and the United Nations. Joint efforts are needed to fight the menace of international terrorism including cross-border terrorism to allow our people to concentrate single-mindedly on the issues which matter such as better education, health, reduction of poverty and so on.

India, like Cambodia is a developing country. We are proud of our achievements in various sectors such as science and technology, agriculture, fisheries, railways, communication, space technology, and defence related technologies. We have developed our capacities both on the higher side of the technological spectrum and at a simple, functional level, which is appropriate to our social, economic, and environmental condition. Our policy adopted since independence, of building up a reservoir of highly skilled scientific and technical manpower has served us well, and in this age of information technology is beginning to pay us rich dividends. In this and many other diverse fields, the Government of India is ready to share its experiences and expertise with the Royal Government of Cambodia.

I understand that tourism, helped by the return of stability and the marvels of your country's ancient civilization, is rising once again since last year. I am happy that we are able to assist this process in a small way through Government of India's programme of technical cooperation known as ITEC. In 1987, we had sent a dedicated team of archaeologists, engineers, chemical scientists, surveyors, masons, and stone-cutters from the Archaeological Survey of India to repair and preserve the Angkor Vat Temples. The team worked continuously for seven years, in difficult conditions, to restore the monument to its ancient glory. I understand they also trained a Cambodian work force in the relevant conservation techniques to enable them to perform certain required tasks on their own. I am happy to know that the work done by the ASI has been praised by UNESCO and appreciated by the Royal Cambodian Government.

Excellency, we feel deeply honoured by your visit, which reflects the age-old close ties of friendship between India and Cambodia. The discussions and exchange of views we had earlier this evening will contribute towards enhancing relations between our countries. May I raise a toast—to the strengthening of our friendly bilateral relations, to you and your delegation's good health, and to the prosperity of the people of Cambodia.

Let Indo-Mauritius Friendship Grow

I FEEL HONOURED and privileged to be with you and the people of Mauritius, on the historic occasion of your first Independence Day celebrations of the New Millennium. I am deeply touched, Mr. Prime Minister, by your invitation. Indeed, your invitation, and my presence here on this momentous occasion, symbolize the ties of kinship that bind our two countries together.

We in India rejoice at your success in building a prosperous country, a peaceful society, and a vibrant democratic polity. As we celebrate with you these achievements, I am reminded of those whose struggle and sacrifice have made all this possible. Above all, I think of one person whose life-long dedication to the freedom and progress of Mauritius will forever be written in letters of gold. I speak, Mr. Prime Minister, of your illustrious father, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. Common ideals and aspirations spurred our struggle against colonialism. This is best reflected in the fact that Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.

We are aware of the reasons why you celebrate your Independence Day on March 12. Seventy years ago, on March 12, 1930, the Mahatma set out on what history now records as his famous "Dandi March".

His defiance of the British Empire through Satyagraha was and remains—symbolic of the strength of one man's courage of conviction and the collective power of a people motivated by the ideals of freedom and equality.

Speech at the banquet hosted by the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Port Louis, 10 March 2000

That motivation inspired countless men and women to join the struggle for freedom in my country, as in yours. Today, on this historic occasion, I pay tribute to the courage, sacrifice and vision of the men and women who led our countries to freedom from colonial oppression.

Mr. Prime Minister, the special relationship between our countries is rooted in common ethnicity, linkages of religion and language, and shared civilizational heritage and cultural values. Our pursuit of an open society anchored in the fundamental values of freedom—justice, liberty, and equality—has further strengthened this relationship.

It is on the unshakeable foundation of this relationship that we have embarked upon co-operation on wide-ranging issues and built our economic relations. Our trade is growing. We are finding new areas of investment. We are making headway in the establishment of new joint ventures.

Because of our commitment to democracy, we share a vision of a just, peaceful, and equitable world. We endorse a common agenda in multi-lateral forums, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation.

We deeply appreciate the consistent support extended by Mauritius on issues of concern to us. I take this opportunity to reaffirm our consistent support for the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago.

Today, as we stand together to seize the opportunities of the New Millennium, we need also to remain vigilant against new threats.

Terrorism poses an unprecedented threat to open and democratic societies. We need to work together to evolve and strengthen international consensus against this danger to peace and stability. We have to also guard against forces that seek to

divide our secular societies.

Democracy has been our life-blood; it is the best guarantor of economic development and social progress. Any attempt to strangle democratic aspirations in any part of the world is a threat to democracy. This threat needs to be removed if democracy has to survive.

Mr. Prime Minister, I cannot conclude without mentioning your own contribution to the continuing success story of Mauritius. Under Your leadership, Mauritius has scaled new heights of success. We also acknowledge your personal role in reinforcing the abiding bonds of friendship between our two countries.

May this Millennium Independence Day prove to be another milestone in your country's march to greater glory.

May Mauritius forever shine as a bright jewel of the India Ocean.

May the friendship between our two countries continue to grow.

Resolve Conflict Between Globalization and Local Values

I CONSIDER IT a privilege that the University of Mauritius has conferred on me an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Civil Law *honoris causa*. I accept this honour with humility. I am aware, of course, that more than honouring me, this degree is a tribute to the great friendship and love between India and Mauritius. To be in Mauritius, for me, is like being at my own home. Indeed, given my hectic schedule in India, I sometimes feel more at home in the serene surroundings of your beautiful country.

Friends, we have just entered a new century and a new millennium. All of us here today share the unique privilege of being witness to the passage of history from one era to another. The century we have left just behind was in many ways a turning point in the history of humankind. The end of colonialism and the collapse of totalitarian ideologies led to the emergence of open societies guided by the noble principles of freedom, equality, and justice. Devastating wars served to revitalize mankind's urge for lasting and durable peace.

Giant strides in science and technology marked the conquest of new frontiers of knowledge and the triumph of human intelligence. Vast distances that separated nations were virtually wiped out by the emergence of a global economy.

In the closing years of the last century, the "global village" began to give way to a digital world standing on the edge of a knowledge revolution that in the coming years of the new century could well change our lives forever. Much of this could

not be imagined even some decades ago. The gains of the developments of the previous century cannot be minimized. Democracy has taken deep roots in virtually every corner of the world, barring some exceptions. Discrimination is no longer on the official agenda of any Government. Societies are more open and freedom has led to increasing empowerment of individuals within societies.

But, simultaneously, economic globalization has had a worrisome impact on other areas of our lives and this has naturally given rise to genuine concerns.

Indeed, one major concern is that economic globalization has resulted in increasing income inequality, both within and between nations. One report puts the income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth living in the poorest, at more than doubling between 1960 and the closing years of the 20th century. Yet another area of concern is the debt burden of the developing nations. This burden grows yearly with new debts being contracted to pay off current interest charges. This results in a continual haemorrhage of wealth from the developing countries to the developed countries.

It is ironical that while globalization and opening of economies are supposed to encourage competition and ensure freedom of choice for individuals, in recent times we have seen big companies indulging in mergers and acquisitions that would not have been possible in the pre-globalization period. The emergence of these new mega-corporations threatens both competition and freedom of choice. Of no less concern is the fact that these huge global corporations enjoy sufficient financial clout to erode the regulatory powers of nations and ride roughshod over the rights of individuals to determine their future.

Whereas post-colonialism had held out the promise of an egalitarian world order and globalization was supposed to deliver economic equality among nations, the reality is to the

contrary. In the unequal post-globalization world in which we live today, inequality is on the increase. Two hundred and fifty years ago, the richest countries were only five times richer than the poorest, and Europe only twice as rich as China or India. In 1976, Switzerland was 52 times richer than Mozambique. In 1997, it was 508 times richer. This increasing inequality has bred increasing poverty. The number of the poor—and I refer to the marginalized and the vulnerable—has increased. It continues to increase.

If one in four of the world's persons still live in severe poverty, there is something wrong somewhere. In South Asia alone, half a billion people live in poverty. The situation is made worse by the fact that developing countries with decreasing resources, both natural and financial, are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their social obligations.

Removing economic inequality, both between and within nations, is one of the challenges that the developing world has to meet in the new century.

The developing world, where economic poverty stands out in sharp contrast to cultural richness, can best meet this challenge by seeking to convert its poor into non-poor. This can be achieved primarily by giving them access to health, education, jobs, and decision-making. We have to ensure that economic growth takes into account the poor. Simultaneously, we have to strive to remove inequality between nations.

On its part, the developed world must provide market access to the developing countries. The time has also come to solve the riddle about the flow of labour not keeping pace with the liberalization of trade and investment. Protectionism, as practised by developed countries, can only further increase the distance that separates the rich from the poor.

We also need to actively consider a global initiative to fight poverty. In a global economy, poverty eradication cannot be treated as exclusive responsibility of individual nations. Therefore, a new global strategy against poverty is called for.

Our experience in India has convinced us that socio-economic development is intrinsically linked to democracy and open society. While elsewhere in the world there are signs of intolerance and societies withdrawing behind bigotry and religious exclusivism, we in India have used the spirit of democracy to harmonize relations within and between religious, linguistic, and ethnic communities.

The point, ladies and gentlemen, that I am seeking to emphasize, is that democracy and development are two sides of the same coin.

As a democratic country with a plural and open society, India cannot but seek to forge a democratic and plural world order. India has therefore, always projected the voice of the weak in the fora of the world. We have steadfastly promoted the fundamental importance of equality and equity in world order where there are both the strong and the weak, the white and the coloured, the rich and the poor.

It is for this reason that we are against the protectionism of the rich. We are opposed to the tendency to use trade and investment to promote biased political and economic objectives in such vital areas as labour standards, intellectual property rights, human rights, and environment.

And, while we recognize the forces of globalization, we have not hesitated to assert the need to recognize the priorities and honour the values of individual nations.

Traditional values and cultural identities are those attributes that have prevented the world from becoming homogenous, imparting distinctive characteristics to nations and thus making the global family that much more richer. This pluralism is now facing a threat with market values becoming increasingly pervasive.

More and more nations, especially those with civilizational history stretching back many millennia, have begun voicing concern over what has been described as conflict between

"global market-based values and local values based on cultural and regional specificity".

This conflict needs to be resolved and traditional values preserved from market values that tend to have a dehumanizing and desensitizing impact because of their over emphasis on the material as well as the excellence of the individual as opposed to the excellence of society as a whole.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I conclude, I wish to mention the threat to democratic and open societies from terrorism, which, unless checked, will emerge as the scourge of the 21st century.

Terrorism has become a constant source of worry for open societies as it threatens peace, stability, and security. The fact that terrorism today is linked with drug-trafficking, arms smuggling, money-laundering, and religious fundamentalism makes it a greater threat than ever before.

The scourge of terrorism can be defeated only by organized and concerted international action. We know that in our fight against terrorism, we have the support of Mauritius. Here again, a global strategy is called for to counter terrorism.

Our ties of friendship with your great country are both historic and time-tested. We are delighted by the Mauritian economic miracle. We acknowledge your democratic and plural society. We know that, like us, you too are committed to remain vigilant against any threat to your many-hued achievements and chosen way of life.

I, once again, thank the University of Mauritius for the honour conferred on me.

I thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, and all distinguished guests, for this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you.

Forging a Durable Partnership Between the World's Two Largest Democracies

I AM DELIGHTED to welcome President Clinton to India. His visit provides us a unique opportunity for a historic transformation in our relations.

We have just concluded a very productive meeting. President Clinton and I have had an in-depth exchange of views on many subjects. Our two delegations have also held extensive discussions. Our discussions have been warm, friendly, and candid, reflecting our common desire to build a new relationship of mutual trust and respect. Our objective is to forge a durable, politically constructive, and economically productive partnership between the world's two largest democracies. I think with President Clinton's visit, and our meeting today, we have laid a firm foundation for the future.

President Clinton and I have just signed a "Vision Statement". The statement outlines the contours and defines the agenda of our partnership in the 21st century. We both agree that our commitment to the principles and practice of democracy constitutes the bedrock of our relations and for our cooperative efforts internationally for peace, prosperity, and democratic freedom. We have also concluded agreements and understandings on the establishment of very wide-ranging dialogue architecture. Closer contacts between our business and scientific communities would be encouraged. Both countries will endeavour to enhance trade and investment, cooperate in

Statement after signing agreements with President Clinton of USA, New Delhi, 21 March 2000

energy and environment, and to draw upon their vast reservoir of talent, especially in the areas of information technology and frontier sciences, for the betterment of the lives of their peoples.

We share a common concern at the growing threat of terrorist violence and its links with religious extremism and illegal trade in narcotics. Both of us expressed our firm opposition to the use of any form of violence, whether as an instrument of terror against democratic societies or as a means of realizing territorial ambitions. Nothing justifies the use of such methods against innocent people. We expressed our determination to intensify our cooperation in this area.

President Clinton and I had a frank discussion on the issues of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The dialogue, which is in progress between our two countries on these issues, has enhanced mutual understanding of our respective concerns. I have explained to



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the U.S. President Mr Bill Clinton exchanging the documents on "India-US relations: A vision for the 21st century", New Delhi, 21 March 2000

President Clinton the reasons that compel us to maintain a minimum nuclear deterrent. I have reiterated our firm commitment not to conduct further nuclear explosive tests, not to engage in a nuclear arms race and not to be the first to use nuclear weapons against any country. We have resolved to continue our dialogue and to work together in cooperation with other countries to help bring about a peaceful and secure world completely free of the threat of all weapons of mass destruction.

In our discussions on regional issues, I reiterated our policy of developing friendly and cooperative relations with all our neighbours in accordance with established principles of good-neighbourly relations, respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and on the basis of agreements solemnly entered into. India remains committed to resolving its difference with its neighbours through peaceful bilateral dialogue and in an atmosphere free from the threat of force and violence. We agreed that problems between countries of the region should be resolved peacefully by the concerned countries themselves.

As a means of implementing our agenda of partnership in the 21st century, we have agreed to regular summit meetings. President Clinton has invited me to Washington. I am delighted to accept.

The President will have the opportunity over the next few days to see the rich cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity of our country, to experience the warmth and friendship of our people, to witness the delicate blend of tradition and modernity in our society and to feel the democratic pulse of our large nation. I wish the President and the members of his delegation a very pleasant stay in India.

In the end, I would like to make some remarks on the tragic events in Jammu and Kashmir yesterday. The brutal massacre of 36 Sikhs in Jammu and Kashmir last night is further evidence of the ethnic cleansing that has been under way for a decade and is part of a pattern that we have experienced earlier, including during my visit to Lahore last year. The nation and the entire civilized community is outraged at this premeditated act of barbarism and joins us in condemning this act.

The attempt at cloaking acts of terrorism in the guise of jihad carries no conviction. We and the international community reject the notion that jihad can be part of any civilized country's foreign policy.

None should doubt the determination of the people of India to safeguard the secular unity of our society. Together we have defeated all such challenges in the past and we shall do so again. We have the means and will to eliminate this menace.

Beginning of a Vibrant Indo-US Relationship

THANK YOU, Mr. President for a thought provoking address. Your remarks about democracy evoke many personal memories.

It was more than 45 years ago that I first entered this Parliament as a member of Lok Sabha. I sat in the opposition benches and saw the precepts and conventions of our great democracy being established under the guidance of our founding fathers.

The traditions that our founding fathers established have served us well in these fifty years. As we have matured, so has our democracy.

India is the oldest civilization in the world, but a young nation-state. But democracy, rule of law, pluralism, and accommodation of the other point of view, have struck such firm roots as to become unshakable.

As a democracy, we know that we have to evolve continuously to keep our democratic practices responsible to the changing times. In fact, this too is rooted in Indian traditions.

Speech given after President Clinton's address to Parliament, New Delhi, 22 March 2000

For centuries, our civilization has drawn strength from a pluralism that included adaptability and receptivity to new thinking, new concepts, new influences. Certain basic tenets, however, which are the core of the Indian ethos, remained intact through this process.

Our freedom struggle was hinged on a robust national awakening and on democratic debate with the widest possible participation of our people. Our experience with colonialism rekindled even more forcefully our attachment to independence of judgment and autonomy of action, our opposition to systems and regimes that seek to perpetuate discrimination and inequality.

For half a century, India has been consistent in the pursuit of international peace and legitimate security for all through global disarmament.

We still remain committed to a world free of nuclear weapons and believe that this is the way to enhance global security. We, however, find that our environment continues to witness proliferation of nuclear weapons and missiles. Such proliferation continues with impunity.

Our decision to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent is prompted by a realistic assessment of our security compulsions even as we continue our traditional policies of acting with restraint and responsibility. Our defence posture has always been defensive in nature. We are aware of the importance that you attach, Mr. President, to the subject of non-proliferation.

We believe that as democracies, we have to take all steps on the basis of wide consultation and cooperation.

India has always tried to develop its relations with its neighbours in an atmosphere of mutual trust and on the basis of mutually advantageous initiatives. Recent developments have unfortunately eroded that relationship of trust with one of them.

Our approach is realistic. We believe that mature nation states must seek durable and pragmatic solutions to differences only through peaceful, bilateral dialogue.

Aggressive use of force is no longer an acceptable language in international relations.

Mr. President, as our dialogue intensifies, India and the United States must move beyond a mere intersection of interests to a focusing of our vision. The statement that we signed yesterday is the first step in this direction.

There is a vivid, vibrant example of the kind of relationship that should exist between us. Hundreds of thousands of Indians are today in the United States. Your country has given them the opportunity to realize their potential. In turn, they are contributing to progress in every sphere. That partnership is not contingent upon governments. It is a day-to-day, working relationship, an inter-being. It is one that enables both sides to benefit.

It is also satisfying that our countries have started cooperation to address another vital aspect of international security.

The problem of terrorism with its link to ideologies of extremism and funding through illegal trade in narcotics is one of the biggest challenges facing nation-states today. We need to consider whether we are doing enough to strike at the root of this menace, which breeds on hatred and violence and is the very anti-thesis of democracy.

Mr. President, your visit marks the beginning of a new voyage in the new century by two countries which have all the potential to become natural allies. In this context, we can do no better than to recall to ourselves the stirring words of the great American poet, Walt Whitman. Noting that a "Passage to India" is always "Passage to more than India", Whitman, in his long and admiring poem on India, called upon our two peoples to:

*"Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go."*

Mr. William Jefferson Clinton, I conclude by extending, on behalf of the people of India, my best wishes to you and to the people of your great country. I do hope your visit to India will be a memorable one.

VIII

Miscellaneous

Security Agencies Should Minimize Inconvenience to Public

I AM HAPPY to be here on the 14th SPG Raising Day. I extend my warm felicitations to all members of the SPG and their families on this occasion.

I also congratulate all those SPG personnel who have been awarded the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service and the Indian Police Medal for Meritorious Service for their creditable performance.

The SPG has the sensitive and difficult task of ensuring the security of the top leadership of the country. They have to accomplish this task with the cooperation and assistance of the State and Central Police Forces.

They also have to closely work with the foreign security agencies in ensuring adequate security arrangements for tours abroad. This naturally demands a lot of professionalism, commitment, and dedication.

I have been watching, for some time, the functioning of the SPG from close quarters. I admire their professional skills and dedication to their duties. I am sure the other SPG protectees will agree with me in my assessment of the SPG and the creditable service they have been rendering over the years.

VIP security systems, while being failsafe, should also take care of the convenience of the public. Highly demonstrative and restrictive security arrangements may be effective, but they definitely cause unnecessary hardship to the people.

Speech at the 14th Raising Day of the Special Protection Group, New Delhi,
8 April 1999

Certain amount of inconvenience is inevitable in controlling the movement of people and traffic, but it should be ensured that it is kept to the minimum. I have been stressing this with the security agencies for quite some time and some improvement has been noticed in this regard. However, I feel that more needs to be done. I urge the security professionals to examine this aspect in detail and take further measures to reduce the deployment of uniform security personnel to the minimum and avoid unnecessary traffic stoppage. I am glad that the SPG has taken the initiative in this regard and is seeking the views of prominent personalities from different fields to further improve the VIP security system.

The present security environment is seriously affected by terrorism, insurgency, and the activities of the fundamentalist groups. Terrorism has become a global phenomenon with terrorists groups linking with each other across the world with the help of the latest communication technologies. To counter them, security agencies too need to have better coordination with each other. They need to constantly upgrade their skills and share them to ensure that the least well-equipped agency does not become the weakest link in the security chain.

At the same time, it is the duty of the security agencies to educate the public and make our people more security conscious. An alert citizenry makes the task of security agencies easier.

My government is conscious of the difficult conditions under which the SPG functions. We will do everything possible to look after their welfare and improve their working conditions.

Last year, I was pleased to inaugurate the Dwaraka Complex of the SPG, into which many SPG personnel and their families have now moved in. I wish them a pleasant stay there.

Further, for the welfare of the families of SPG personnel, a grant of Rs.10 lakh is being given to the SPG Family Welfare Fund.

Finally, I wish all the members of the SPG family every success in their endeavours.

Religions Bind us Together

THREE HUNDRED YEARS ago, when the country was under foreign rule our countrymen were subjected to humiliation and torture. The people were dejected. It was then that Guru Gobind Singhji Sahab protected the religion by founding Khalsa Panth. The society was fragmented. The divisions on the basis of caste were endangering the unity of the society and advantage was being taken by divisive forces. Guru Gobind Singhji Maharaj united the country in one thread. He took along those who were poor, *dalits* and weak and gave a new direction to the country.

The first centenary was not celebrated because the country was not independent then, the second centenary was also not celebrated because of the same reason. Now we have our own rule and hence the tercentenary is being organized. This is not confined only to Punjab. This Mahotsav is being celebrated throughout the country; it is being celebrated abroad also. All parties have joined in celebrating it. The people and the Government are cooperating in organising the Mahotsav. The Government of India has constituted a National Committee for this purpose. The Government has provided every possible assistance. If more help is required, the centre will fulfil the additional requirements. Prakash Singh Badalji has suggested the setting up of a centre for military training. Though now a days war is fought lesser on land and more in the air. Youngsters need to be taught discipline. They should be taught about patriotism. The national interest is supreme and this spirit

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi at the Tercentenary Celebrations of the formation of Khalsa Panth, Anandpur Saheb, 8 April 1999

should be instilled in them. For this, I accept the suggestion of Badal Sahib for setting up of military training centre here. More details will be worked out after discussions.

Punjab is the granary of India, Punjab is the entry point for India. Punjab has suffered many blows from the outsiders. A few years back the state got trapped in internal problems but I am glad that Punjab is now moving on the right path. It is not only fulfilling the requirements of the land and its people but also contributing to the nation's progress. A lot of work has been done in Punjab but it is true that some work is still left out. In fact, there is no end to development. More we go ahead, more is the urge to go further, the needs grow. Punjab is contributing to India's progress. Many-many thanks, many-many congratulations to Punjab for this.

Punjab contributed immensely to the freedom struggle. This struggle continued for generations, the tradition of sacrifice was maintained. There is hardly any parallel to Guru Gobind Singhji Maharaj in the world history. When he got the news of his sons' sacrifice, he said "I did not have four sons, I have thousands of sons and I can sacrifice all of them". Such a unique example is rare in the world history. The protection of religion, the religion that one imbibes—the religion which gives us power, which coordinates, which binds, which does not divide. There are different religions but Guru Gobind Singhji founded Khalsa Panth for the protection of religion.

No attempt should be made to impose one's faith on others. Secularism means equal respect for all religions. Secularism is not negative. Secularism does not prevent us from having faith in a religion. Secularism means that all the systems of worship should be respected, having faith in your own system of worship but respecting systems of worship of others. This Secularism in India is ingrained in us, right from birth. We do not have to learn this from outside. In this country no exploitation has ever occurred in the name of religion. India has diversity; there are differences, there are various systems of worship, there are various languages, there are different

lifestyles. But this country is one, all Indians living in this country are children of mother India. We are one; we have to march ahead, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder. In this, Guru Gobind Singhji Maharaj, his life, his writings would help us.

The Mahotsav of tercentenary should bring new life in the country; strengthen the brotherhood. It should inspire us to go ahead on the path of development. I am sure of this. I would like to end my speech with Guru Gobind Singhji Maharaj's words.

*"Deh Siva var mohe ihe Subh karman te kubhun na taron.
Na daron urison jab jaye laron, Nische kar apni jeet karon."*

If I have to fight, if I am forced to fight them I should fight with bravery but I should not shy away from pious and good tasks. This feeling should go to one and all—this spirit should pervade in the whole society.

The demands are increasing. How much money is there in the treasury, it is not known. There is a suggestion that there should be a straight road from Chandigarh to Anandpur Saheb. The road is there, but it should be of four lanes. The Government of India will consider this.

Preserve Mother Earth

I AM HAPPY to be with all of you on the occasion of World Environment Day. It is a day to show our gratefulness to Mother Nature, which sustains human life on our planet. It is also a day to focus our attention on our collective failure to protect the environment, which has endangered sustainable development for the human race.

Speech at a function to mark the World Environment Day, New Delhi,
5 June 1999

The theme of this year's World Environment Day starkly captures this concern. It tells us: **"Our Earth. Our Future. Just Save it."** This is an urgent appeal to each one of us to recognize the gravity of the challenge and to renew our pledge to take remedial action.

Conservation and protection of the environment have been the cornerstone of Indian ethos and culture. Our spiritual heritage teaches us that respect for nature is a pre-condition for peace and harmony in life. The first lessons in sustainable and non-violent development were learnt by our society when our sages guided us to see sacredness in everything in nature.

The prayer in the *Atharva Veda* states: "What of thee I dig out, let that quickly grow over. Let me not hit thy vitals or thy heart." Hence, a traditional Indian who worships a tree is not promoting any superstition. Rather, consciously or unconsciously, he is spreading the message of environmental conservation.



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee addressing on the occasion of the World Environment Day, New Delhi, 5 June 1999

In spite of this rich cultural tradition, the state of the environment in India today ought to be a cause of deep concern to all of us. Many of our cities are among the most polluted in the world. Our rivers at many places—including in Delhi—have become highly dirty. Our forest cover is rapidly depleting. Soil erosion and degradation have become a major problem in our agriculture. The amenities for safe drinking water and sanitation are so inadequate for the poor in cities and in villages that they are harming their health and happiness. Already the water table is dropping so fast in many places that we may not have enough water for all our needs in the coming decades.

It is clear that we as a nation cannot postpone urgent introspection on our path of development in the past fifty years. No doubt, we have many achievements to our credit and we should be proud of them. But, perhaps, one of our greatest failures has been the neglect of the environment even as we went ahead with industrialization and urbanization in India. Unless we make amends soon, we will be guilty of making our future generations victims of an environmental and human catastrophe.

Friends, I have deliberately struck a strong note of warning—which, in any case, is not an exaggeration—because I would like the entire nation to become aware of the seriousness of the problem staring us in our faces.

To our friends in industry, I make a fervent appeal today. Do not wait for either the government or the judiciary to enforce environmental laws. Voluntary and speedy compliance is good for both industry and society. Do not think of investment in environment-friendly technologies as a burden you can shirk. It is a moral, social, and legal obligation you must fulfil. Moreover, it makes good business sense in the medium and long term. Wherever possible—and it is possible in many cases—we should also implement low-cost green technologies that are appropriate to our needs and conditions.

We must of course, not overlook the fact that many of the problems that India and other developing nations are facing on

the environmental front are not entirely our own doing. Industrialized nations cannot absolve themselves of the far greater contribution they have made to environmental degradation around the world. Nations have boundaries, but the environment has none.

If rich nations continue to put unrelenting pressure on our planet's limited and non-renewable resources, and if the present glaring imbalances in global economic growth continue, damages to the environment will be universal. Ironically, the poor have to pay a heavier price for the guilt of the rich.

On the occasion of World Environment Day, therefore, India joins the environment-conscious people around the globe in demanding radical changes in the international financial and trading systems. The gulf between developing and developed nations, as also the worsening conditions of want in developing nations, are not only a source of social discord but also environmental degradation.

It is heartening to note that awareness about the environment has grown considerably in recent years not only around the globe but also within India. This is due to the combined as well as separate exertions of the government, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies. Experience shows, however, that people's active participation is the best guarantor of the desired results. All of us have been talking for a long time about making environmental protection a people's movement. In some places, this has indeed happened. The challenge before us is how to broaden and deepen its sweep.

In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that there is no basic conflict between development and environmental protection. It is impossible to think of one without the other. Sometimes, however, even genuine developmental projects are opposed in the name of protecting the environment. Some of the critical delays in the completion of infrastructure projects, with huge investment outlays and large-scale social benefits are due to this reason. India cannot afford such delays.

Indeed, in a country like India, environmental protection is more likely to become a mass movement if we are able to give it a strong development and employment thrust. I am happy to note that the ministry of environment and forests has followed this enlightened approach in formulating its programmes. For example, its Action Plan to achieve 33 per cent forest cover in the country in a time bound manner would generate large-scale employment, particularly in rural areas where it is most needed.

Another scheme that has a similar thrust of employment and grassroots growth—and whose launch I am pleased to announce today—is the augmentation of bamboo resources in the country. Many communities belonging to the weaker sections of society depend on bamboo for their livelihood. This scheme can generate up to five million mandays of rural employment.

It will specifically promote the interests of bamboo workers and boost the production of value-added goods for sale in the domestic market. Bamboo products also have a huge untapped potential for export. However, for this scheme to be really successful, the states will have to change some of their rules and regulations governing bamboo.

I also compliment the Ministry for Environment and Forests for launching a special scheme to promote the involvement of rural women in raising forest nurseries through the Integrated Rural Development Programme. The production of high quality seedlings is crucial for the success of all our forest development programmes.

I would like that all the concerned Ministries and agencies like the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Ministry of Agriculture, Khadi & Village Industries Commission, the Planning Commission, and State Governments to synergize their efforts for the successful implementation of these programmes.

Project Tiger has been the flagship of our wildlife conservation efforts. India is proud to be the only country in the world to be home to this wonderful animal. But with pride comes the responsibility to protect the tiger for posterity. I am happy

that the outlay for this scheme has been raised significantly in the Ninth Plan and that six new tiger reserves will be added to the existing 23 reserves.

Today is also the Foundation Day of the National Museum of Natural History. This Museum has played a key role in sensitizing our children about the priceless bio-diversity of India. I am happy that the Ministry has been running many programmes to expose the students of our schools and colleges to the rich flora and fauna of our country. This effort should be further expanded.

Friends, the Ministry for Environment has taken many commendable initiatives. The only thing about its work that one might take exception to is that it has been rather silent about its performance. This, however, is not surprising. The one lesson all of us should learn from our natural environment is how our land and forests and rivers work silently and yet harmoniously, so that life on this planet is sustained generation after generation.

I appeal to every sector of society—governments and non-governmental organizations, individuals and community groups, business and industry, religious organizations, the civil society at large, and particularly the younger generation—to learn from nature this great quality of silent but ceaseless service. Let all of us do the little things based on thinking globally and acting locally. Each small measure we take is important. No one can do everything, but each of us can do something to help sustain Mother Earth.

Successful Millennium Expedition to Everest

I HAD FLAGGED off this expedition on 19 March. Today I 'flag it in'. The team has returned after a successful expedition. After hoisting the tricolour—the nation's pride—on the Everest, the team has returned. We all congratulate them. Their heroic efforts have done India a great honour.

Attempting Everest from Kangshung side is a unique feat and this team has succeeded in completing it. When Santoshji informed me of their success of scaling the summit on May 28 I was in the Cabinet meeting and we were discussing Kargil. Kargil is also a mountainous terrain with high hills and without caring for their lives our jawans are climbing these hills to vacate the hills of the enemies. Both the operations have a similarity to an extent.

I wondered how the members of the expedition could have remained stuck to the tents for 14 long days. For me it is hard to imagine how these people could have confined themselves to their tents, while there was blizzard and heavy snowfall outside and it was not possible to venture out. But it happened. And after a long and hard struggle for 14 days, the expedition once again set out on its victory trip and stopped only after achieving its aim. I have been introduced to Mr. Sange Sherpa. He is a man, who has conquered Everest from three different directions. We congratulate Mr. Sange. We congratulate Smt. Santosh Yadav. She exhibited exemplary leadership qualities. She stayed back, but inspired the team to move ahead. She did not bother about her personal glory. Her only concern was victorious return of her team. This was her supreme concern. We want to congratulate her heartily. We

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi while flagging in the Millennium Everest Expedition, New Delhi, 16 June 1999

want to felicitate her.

More and more youth should come forward for mountaineering expeditions. In army, mountaineering training should be provided. It is necessary. Some arrangements for training do exist, but in emergent situations we have to send jawans on high hills for our protection. To meet such emergencies, we need jawans in large numbers, who should be well-versed in mountaineering. Therefore, necessary arrangements are required to be made in this regard. I am sure, we will activate ourselves in this direction too.

Every Indian Haji Should Return a Contented Haji

I AM GRATEFUL to the Haj Committee for inviting me to be the Chief Guest at the All India Haj Conference, which has been convened to discuss arrangements relating to Haj - 2000.

Haj is not merely a visit to a Holy site or a shrine. It is the most important religious act in the life of a Muslim. It is also the most important event in the life of the global community of Muslims. Nothing symbolizes the universality of Islam more spectacularly than the sacred ritual of Haj.

It is, indeed, a unique ritual. The entire Muslim Ummah participates in it at the same time of the year. The Quran-Sharif and the Hadeeth have emphasized the great significance of Haj for the spiritual elevation of the individual and the community.

Prophet Muhammad is believed to have stated that the Haji is "as sinless as on the day his mother gave birth to him", and that the reward for Haj is "nothing short of paradise".

Truly, the Haj is a supreme religious experience that brings the Ummah together in response to the call of the Supreme Being.

Distinguished guests, India is a land of pilgrims and pilgrimages. We are also a multi-religion country. Religion occupies a very important place in the lives of our people. In spite of the great diversity of creeds and customs, however, there are some things that are common to our culture. One of them is the tradition of the yatra or the pilgrimage.

Performing a pilgrimage is an act of self-cleansing, which enables the pilgrim to become a better human being and a better member of society. Anyone who goes to a holy place for a pilgrimage not only has a sense of self-fulfillment but is also held in greater respect by his family and the community. Haj is a very arduous pilgrimage. It is also very rewarding. That is why, when a Haji returns home, he receives an affectionate welcome. Often, non-Muslims also go to the house of a Haji to greet him.



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee with members of Haj Committee, New Delhi, 5 August 1999

This is a precious Indian tradition. We must preserve it.

Religious freedom is the cornerstone of our secular culture and civilization. We have always practised and cherished the principle of Sarva Panth Sambhav, (equal respect for all faiths).

This, too, is a precious Indian tradition. We must preserve it.

While the Haj is the supreme religious experience for the Haji, it has also been a supreme management challenge to governments and officials of all the countries down the ages. The commitment of all governments, including my own, is to make the best possible arrangements that would enable pilgrims from the respective countries to perform the Haj in peace, comfort, and safety.

It is equally gratifying that, over the years, the arrangements made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have improved considerably and pilgrims from India are able to perform their Haj with far greater comfort than ever before.

Today, more than one lakh Indian pilgrims perform the Haj annually, with two-thirds of them going through Haj Committee, while the others do so through private tour operators. I am happy that the Haj Committee has been making good arrangements for the accommodation of our pilgrims, their movement by air, and their transport from one point to another between Jeddah and the Holy cities. It has been doing so within the framework of the rules and regulations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Government too has responded well to the needs of the pilgrims. Now, we have computerized the pilgrims' data relating to accommodation and flight allotments and movement within Saudi Arabia. We also have the institution of building Selection Teams in which the Central and State Haj Committees are involved in selecting the best possible accommodation for our pilgrims at the lowest possible rates. Our arrangements match the best made by other countries.

We are, however, not complacent. I assure all of you that the Government will provide all possible assistance to make constant improvements based on the feedback we receive from our pilgrims. I want every Indian Haji to return as a happy and contented Haji, carrying with him one of the most precious memories of his life.

After all, our pilgrims also act as India's ambassadors of goodwill and amity when they meet their counterparts from other countries.

I recognize that there is a need to have India's quota for Haj increased. It is also necessary to add new embarkation points for the pilgrims in places such as Ahmedabad, Srinagar, and Lucknow.

I welcome the focus of this conference on improving the training and orientation of our pilgrims. Many of our pilgrims are poor people, who come from rural areas and small towns. Naturally, the air journey, fending in a foreign land, and transactions in foreign currencies, is often bewildering for them. They need assistance and they need to be looked after well.

At the same time, since nearly two million pilgrims from different countries perform Haj at the same time, there is a need to ensure that our pilgrims are protected from stampedes and any possible accidents. I am confident that with the cooperation of all of you, this first major step undertaken by the new Haj Committee will be successful.

Distinguished guests, I would like to take this opportunity to clear up possible misunderstanding among certain sections about the Government and Haj management. I am very clear in my mind that the Haj is the most important religious experience for a large section of our countrymen and it is the responsibility of all governments, regardless of party affiliation, to ensure that the Haj arrangements are the best possible.

There is no room for party politics in Haj management. All

of us should pledge ourselves to providing the best possible service to our pilgrims, with no thought of personal or political advantage.

I am glad to observe that this is the clear message that has been conveyed to the members of the present Haj Committee by its new Chairman, Janna Tanveer Ahmad Sahab.

Let me now touch upon another issue that might be agitating the minds of several among you. This is regarding the promulgation of a new Haj Act. The management of Haj in India at present is governed by the Haj Committee Act, 1959, which is forty years old. During this period, much has changed in the area of Haj.

However, we still have to collectively resolve a number of issues before bringing in a new Haj Act. What should be the new system of Haj management in our country? Should the new Act merely change the composition of the Haj Committee and give it an All-India character, while retaining the rest of the set-up? Alternatively, should there be some new structures that would create an integrated and relatively autonomous body?

Again, should the new Haj Committee be only concerned with policy issues or should it also exercise executive responsibility in the management of Haj?

These are important matters on which decisions will have to be taken. This is necessarily a consultative process. I would like all the socio-religious Muslims organizations in India to give their constructive suggestions, so that we can evolve a new model of Haj management that will hopefully serve us well for the next many decades.

All of us share the responsibility to ensure that a new Act is promulgated as quickly as possible, perhaps even in the next Lok Sabha. But this is not something we should rush into. I suggest that a special All-India Haj Conference be soon convened to examine this matter thoroughly. The conference should produce a consensual document that can be placed

before Parliament by the end of this year or early next year. My government will extend its full cooperation and support in this regard.

I am aware that today's Conference has a busy agenda pertaining to Haj-2000. I have little doubt that, as a result of your efforts, Haj-2000 will see improved arrangements for our pilgrims. My best wishes are with you and with the pilgrims of Haj-2000.

Make Hindi a Medium of National Integration

FIFTY YEARS AGO on this day, the Constituent Assembly had enshrined Hindi as the official language of the Centre. It was a concrete and effective step towards attaining linguistic independence with the cooperation of all the segments and support of the entire country. Hindi became the national language was accepted as the national language and later attained the status of the official language.

India is a multilingual country. The variety or multiplicity of languages does not create any problem for us, but is a symbol of our cultural richness. Problems can be tackled but it is always very essential to protect and enrich the cultural heritage. We all appreciate the utility of a language as a communication medium in a multilingual country. It is a pleasant coincidence here and needs to be mentioned on this occasion that Hindi got the very first and maximum support from non-Hindi speaking regions. Subramania Bharati from Tamil Nadu, Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Dayanand Saraswati

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the official language, New Delhi, 14 September 1999

from Gujarat, Keshav Chandra Sen and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose from Bengal—all these great men raised their voices in support of Hindi as the language of the country. During that period, the question of language was not linked with the job opportunities. The issue of language was related to the country's identity, its dignity and nationalism and therefore, Hindi moved ahead with everyone's concurrence and cooperation.

Besides the Centre, Hindi is also the official language of several states. There, Hindi is used as a medium of communication for administration, education, and judicial verdicts. Not only Hindi but other Indian languages are also prospering and developing as the medium in their respective states. In democracy, the administration has to run with people's participation and this is being catered to in a nice manner by our own languages. Today, on this occasion, I felicitate Hindi and all our Indian languages

Today, the World Hindi conference is beginning in London. Representatives from all over the world have come to participate in it. I send my best wishes to them also.

I have to say a word to our Hindi-speaking segments — they may have complaints with regard to the slow progress of Hindi at the Centre, but it is essential to understand the difficulties in its way. Languages should be a string for binding together, not for breaking. Language should be a medium of expression, not a mode to incite others. There is no controversy regarding language in the country today. Whatever were the disputes, they have been sorted out. I want to tell my Hindi speaking friends that they should also keep in mind the difficulties faced by those who have to learn Hindi. Hindi being the official language, its use as the link language is also increasing. Hindi is spreading, Hindi is being liked. Hindi is attracting new supporters. A little patience is required; one should be considerate about others' feelings while formulating plans and policies.

When I visit our southern states, I see how much people

love their respective mother tongues, how proud they feel of them. Whether it is Tamil Nadu or Karnataka or Andhra and Kerala, the languages of these areas are really rich. Their literature is quite old, Hindi is comparatively a new language, Hindi is a form of Khari Boli or if I may say this is a Khari Boli, there should be no objection to it. Before this, there were other dialects which were and are also rich and varied. They still exist. The tendency to use them afresh is on the increase. This is a good move. But now when I go to south, speaking Hindi is not a problem there. One has to take a little care that the first sentence should be in their mother tongue. It should be in Telugu, it should be in Tamil. After saying "Sodara-Sodari Manulara, if you switch over to Hindi, nobody will object, nobody will create any hurdle. In Tamil Nadu the word "Vanakkam" as if opens all the doors. It opens the doors of heart also. The language has so much power, there is so much impact in one word.

Our languages have to become the language of science, medium of technology, mode of research. Moreover, foreign languages can't carry this responsibility. For this, you need a language of your own. We should study other's languages, we should learn from them. But for research, innovations and for linking present with the past and connecting present with the future, it is necessary that we should develop our own languages. They should be made the medium of communication for modern knowledge and with them, fulfil the need of reaching the common man. Through them, a campaign should be launched to vigorously project the culture and civilization of the country.

I have received a suggestion. I want to mention that a few scholars have been addressed regarding a proposal. It is high time that to assess the contemporary formats of Indian languages, to find out about their requirements and to collect information about the inter-language exchanges and communication, an Indian Language Commission be established. The proposal to set up Indian Language

Commission is good. Had my government not been a caretaker government, I would have accepted the proposal and provided the approval. But now, I can only say that it is a very good proposal, it is an implementable proposal. We have to think about all the Indian languages. How our languages should face the challenges of 21st century, should be considered and if a platform could be provided for such a discussion — I think, it would be a good thing. A final decision on the matter will be taken after the elections.

Gandhi CD—A Storehouse of Gandhiana

I AM VERY happy today while dedicating this Compact Disc on Gandhiji. Today being his birthday, it becomes a special tribute to his memory. As Pramodji was saying Gandhiji has written about himself, written a lot, others have also written about Gandhiji. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has compiled and published these articles, speeches, letters etc. in 100 volumes. A large number of photographs are also available, records of his speeches are also there. But it is the speciality of the CD that speeches, articles and letters of Gandhiji and photographs related to him and his own voice have been brought together at one spot, using the information technology. It has been made possible through the medium of the CD that any user can get the required material in a moment and listen to the sound or search the topic on the computer monitor.

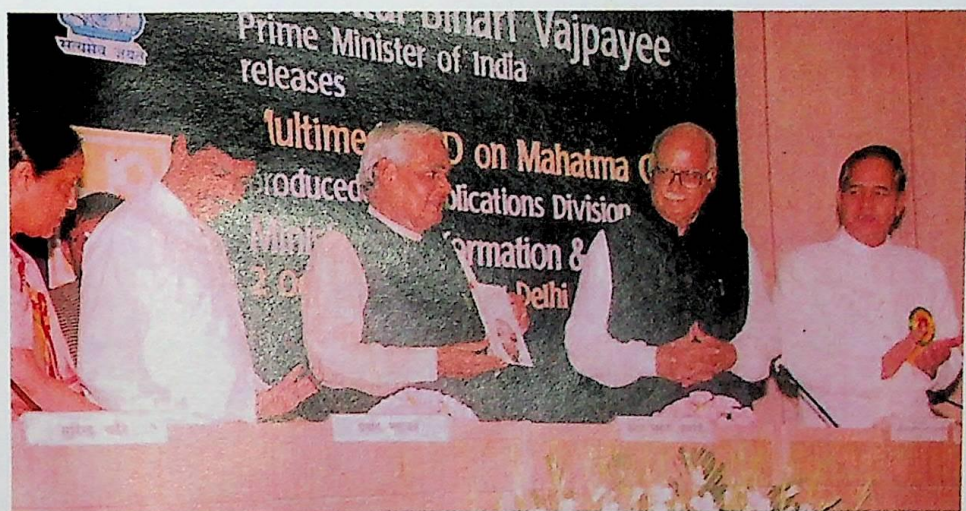
This CD will not only be useful to the educational institutions and scholars undertaking special studies on Gandhiji

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi on the occasion of releasing the Compact Disc on Mahatma Gandhi prepared by Publications Division, New Delhi, 2 October 1999

as they will get so much material at one place in an easy-to-use manner, but it will also be useful to those people and families who are keen to know more about Gandhiji. I believe that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will make plans to publicise, distribute and sell the CD throughout the world. It will be better if the price of the CD is reduced.

Gandhiji was a man spanning all ages. Not only one but several contributions made by him will establish him as a great man for centuries to come. It was for the first time in the history that Non-violence, Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience were used as weapons to challenge the largest empire of the world. There are some people who follow sublime principles at the individual level. But it was a great achievement for Gandhiji that not only he used non-traditional means like Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience to attain independence, but also had millions of Indians accepting his ideas within a short period of a decade or two. He got the support and cooperation of Indian people on a very large scale.

His achievements in the social sphere are equally important.



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee releasing the Compact Disc on Mahatma Gandhi prepared by Publications Division, New Delhi, 2 October 1999

He decided to uproot totally the system of untouchability prevalent for centuries and established the human dignity. He adopted the eradication of untouchability as a form of national task and as a part of freedom struggle. These matters are still relevant, even in today's context. They are still providing the foundation for our national reconstruction. I sometimes think that it was really amazing for Gandhiji, who despite being involved in innumerable problems of India as the leader of our freedom struggle, found time for contributing in international arena and even in smaller matters. He guided thousands of workers and inspired them towards rural development, health and hygiene, naturopathy, leprosy service, new education system, education for women, welfare of Scheduled Castes etc. His ideals of constructive politics and social service will always be the source of inspiration for us. Truly, this can be said without any exaggeration that "Ekam Gandhi, Dwitiyo Naasti",—there was only one Gandhi, no second like him.

Gandhiji was in favour of giving a new identity to business and industry on the basis of the principle of Trusteeship. He used to say that businessmen and rich persons should not treat their money as the one belonging to them only and keep it hoarding with themselves. Instead, they should treat this money as people's wealth. This principle of trusteeship is yet to be put into practice. It is our responsibility to move in a direction that was shown by Gandhiji.

The perception of Swaraj that Gandhiji had, was not confined to the political freedom and elected democracy, but it was a dream to reconstruct every aspect of national life of India, based on our age-old moral and cultural values and traditions.

Gandhiji did not advocate for an India, isolated from rest of the world. He welcomed good ideas from all sides. But, he used to emphasise that India should develop such an infrastructure which should help us in fulfilling our requirements and wherein

there is complete utilization of our material, our resources and our manpower.

Besides, he was for such a model of development which could help other countries of the world also. I am quoting from what he had written long ago in June 1924 in *Young India*—“By self-rule, I mean to maintain the identity of my culture. I want to write several new things but all these should be written on Indian slate. I will be glad to take loan from western countries only if I pay back the principle alongwith a handsome interest.”

In this context, I want to say that though India has taken computer and Information Technology from the West, yet today, we are developing in this area on our own. Today, the world is acknowledging that India is moving in the direction to become software superpower. I want that this development should also be rapid in Hindi and other languages. Martin Luther King has rightly said—“Gandhiji belongs to the ages”. The philosophy or principles of Gandhiji are not confined to a time frame nor are they limited to any particular country or the people. They are for the whole humanity and they will be relevant in all ages.

I congratulate Pramodji and his colleagues, his Ministry for bringing out this CD. What better tribute can be given to Gandhiji on his birth anniversary?

Focusing Attention on the Needs of the North-East

IT GIVES ME great pleasure to be present at the inauguration of the diamond jubilee celebrations of *The Assam Tribune*. It is a privilege to be among you on this day.

Since its inception on August 4, 1939, *The Assam Tribune* has evolved from being a sedate weekly courier of news to a robust daily newspaper. In these sixty years, this newspaper has proved itself to be a powerful instrument of social, political, and economic change in Assam and other north-eastern states.

Those of us who live in Delhi are rarely aware of newspapers published from other states, especially distant states like Assam. They are referred to as regional papers. However, just like India's national identity is a sum total of her regional identities, India's national media would be incomplete without what is described as the regional press.

In any event, labels like "national" press and "regional" press are often misleading. If we look at history of our regional press, we will find that their contribution, both as vehicles of information and instruments of change, is no less, if not more, than that of the so-called national press.

Nor should we forget that newspapers like *The Assam Tribune* were never a part of the imperial enterprise. On the contrary, they contributed to the freedom movement by refusing to be co-opted by India's colonial rulers and openly opposing the policies of India's colonial government.

For the owners and editors of these newspapers, journalism was not a commercial proposition. For them, it was a mission

Speech while inaugurating the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of *The Assam Tribune*, New Delhi, 4 December 1999

that demanded unimpeachable integrity and fierce intellectual independence. Soon after launching *The Assam Tribune*, the late Radha Govinda Baruah proved that he had both in abundant measure.

Severe restrictions were placed on newspapers, especially those run by Indians, under the Defence of India Rules following the outbreak of the Second World War. Undaunted by these restrictions, the late Radha Govinda Baruah maintained the highest traditions of journalism, combining them with the nationalist fervour that was then sweeping through the whole of India.

He displayed exemplary courage by standing up against the Cabinet Mission Plan. Starting then, *The Assam Tribune* was in the forefront of arousing the latent nationalism of India's North-East, thus making a major contribution to the national freedom movement, and to the subsequent consolidation of the country.

After independence, too, *The Assam Tribune* has displayed remarkable national perspective in its editorial columns, even while playing the role of a catalytic agent in the social, political, and economic changes that Assam has witnessed in the five decades since independence.

The Assam Tribune deserves credit for actively channelling the North-Eastern States' regional aspirations towards India's national development efforts. By taking up issues like the establishment of the Guwahati University, Mr. Arun Jaitley referred to these: a separate High Court, a radio station, and oil refineries. *The Assam Tribune* has rightly focussed attention on the development and other legitimate needs of our north-eastern region.

In all this, *The Assam Tribune* has been propelled by the belief—by the correct perception—that national prosperity will be possible only when all states prosper.

Promoting the cause of development in Assam—indeed, the entire north-east—however, is only one facet of *The Assam Tribune's* contribution in the post-Independence era. Whenever India has faced a challenge to her sovereignty and territorial integrity, this newspaper has played a frontline role in mobilizing opinion and boosting public morale. This was most evident during the 1962 Chinese aggression and more recently during this summer's Kargil conflict.

During the dark years of Emergency when every effort was made to curb freedom of expression and impose severe restrictions on media, many a big newspaper, as has been said, chose to crawl when asked to bend. Maintaining the high standards of journalistic integrity set by the late Radha Govinda Baruah, *The Assam Tribune* was one of the few newspapers that chose to stand up and fight. The commitment, I am happy to note, is still intact.

Indeed, in an age where we find principles being compromised and the sense of mission fast disappearing from the noble profession of journalism, *The Assam Tribune* has steadfastly and fiercely protected its integrity and independence.

I congratulate the editorial team and owners of *The Assam Tribune* for their commitment to the highest norms of journalism. Moreover, in keeping with this newspaper's history, I call upon them to play a greater role in the coming years in all nation-building efforts.

My government is committed to a prosperous India—and, therefore, a prosperous north-eastern region. Rapid economic growth and equitable social development figure high on my government's agenda. You can help us achieve these goals by continuing to play a constructive role and serving as a bridge between the people of Assam and the rest of India.

We believe that freedom of expression is the cornerstone of a democracy. A vibrant media ensures a vibrant democracy.

It acts as a watchdog, fulfilling its primary responsibility of keeping the people fully informed.

While it is the duty of media to keep the people informed, it is also necessary that this duty should be fulfilled with absolute scrupulousness, without fear or favour. My government appreciates the fact that due to existing laws, access to official information is often difficult, if not impossible. Often, this results in dissemination of misinformation or even disinformation.

In order to make information more accessible to the people, we are working on right to information law. Once this law is in position, media will stand to gain tremendously in its efforts to keep the people informed.

Similarly, our initiatives on the information technology front should enable media to keep pace with the times. I urge newspapers, especially those published from the North-East and other far-flung areas, to make full use of these initiatives to better serve the interests of their readers.

As in the past, *The Assam Tribune* has set an example for other regional papers by going online. Though published from Guwahati, *The Assam Tribune* can be read by anybody from anywhere in the world.

I thank *The Assam Tribune* family for providing me with this opportunity to join the newspaper's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and recall its services to the nation for the last sixty years.

Message of Christ Transcends Christianity

WE ARE GATHERED here on the last Christmas of this Millennium in remembrance of Jesus Christ who preached love and kindness two thousand years ago.

Today is a day of prayer, celebration, and communion all over the planet. I join my countrymen, and all my countrymen join the peoples of the world, in hailing the values of love, peace, and universal brotherhood that Christmas symbolizes. The traditional Christmas benediction, *Peace on Earth and Goodwill Towards All Men*, is more relevant than ever before.

India is marking this occasion with a Postal Stamp commemorating the 2,000 years of Christ. I have pleasure in releasing this stamp.

It was on this day two thousand years ago that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem. About him it can be said that the Man was the Message. That is why, in celebrating his birthday humanity is born and re-born each year in the awareness of Christ's eternal teaching that all of us are children of the same God and, that, we can indeed create the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth by following the path of truth, non-violence and goodwill for all.

It is remarkable that Christ's birth is celebrated as Christmas all over the world, although only about thirty percent of the world population is Christian. The spirit of gaiety and merriment of Christmas embraces all communities making it a unique multi-cultural festival that is at once ancient and modern.

The message of Christ transcends Christianity. The founders

Speech while releasing postal stamp featuring Jesus Christ, New Delhi,
25 December 1999

and savants of all the great faiths of the world belong to the whole of humanity, just as their teaching too is directed at the human race undivided by any denominations. The common core of their teaching coincides with the light of the human conscience. The sages of ancient India have given a powerful expression to this truth in the saying: *Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti* (The Truth is one, the wise interpret it differently).

In the case of Jesus, not only his life but also his death by crucifixion on a cross carries a universal and eternal teaching.

His life radiated the light of love and compassion for all, but his death was an act by the forces of darkness—of ignorance, intolerance, and violence.

Two thousand years after Christ, the conflict between the forces of light and of darkness still continues.

Mankind has still not been able to free itself from the chains of prejudice, hatred, and bloodshed, in spite of the untold misery caused by wars, pogroms, inquisitions, riots, terrorism, and other violent crimes.

Ironically, much of the violence in history has been perpetrated in the name of religion itself. This unfortunately, continues to be true even in our times.

Celebration of Christmas, therefore, has to be an occasion to rededicate ourselves for the ideals that Christ and many other godly men like him lived for—and also died for.

They are more relevant for our world and our times than perhaps when they were alive.

As an increasingly inter-dependent global community prepares to face the complex challenges of a new century and a new millennium, it needs, more than ever before, the guidance of the essential spiritual values of all the great faiths of the world.

In India also, Christmas is a joyous festival—and not only for Christians. It is celebrated here since the early centuries of the last millennium.

Christianity came to India in the year 52 AD through Saint Thomas, one of the twelve original disciples of Jesus, who landed on the shores of Kerala. Thus, Christianity in India is as old as in Rome, if not older.

The first church in India was built under the patronage of a Hindu king, just as the first mosque too was built under the patronage of a Hindu king. Christians of all denominations have flourished in India.

Several Christian Saints and Popes have visited India. Pope John Paul the Second got a warm welcome from the people of India only last month.

It is instructive to remember these facts for they testify to the fundamentally secular character of Indian society.

The defining principle of Indian nationhood has always been *Sarva Pantha Samabhaava*. It means equal respect for all faiths, because all faiths are equal. This, according to us, is the true meaning of secularism.

Religious bigotry, notions of superiority, exclusivism in the name of religion and, especially, discrimination against religious minorities are alien to our values and culture.

If there are any issues that agitate the followers of any faith, the best and the time-tested way to resolve them is through dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and an awareness of the common national interest.

India has a long tradition of tolerance, and inter-faith dialogue, enriched by noble minds belonging to various religions and capable of resolving any contentious issue.

I pay my tribute to Jesus Christ by invoking the stirring words of Swami Vivekananda taken from his lecture "Christ, The Messenger", which he delivered in California in 1900: "Our salutations go to Jesus Christ and all the past Prophets whose teachings and lives we have inherited, whatever might have been their race, clime or creed! Our salutations go to all

those Godlike men and women who are working to help humanity, whatever be their birth, colour or race! Our salutations to those who are coming in the future—living Gods—to work unselfishly for our descendants.”

CRPF Deserves Laurels

I AM EXTREMELY happy to be with you today. Time flies. Sixty years have passed. I remember when at Neemuch in 1939, CRPF was established. Right from the inception, CRPF is a strong force. But after completing sixty eventful years, it should be bubbling with enthusiasm. There is a saying in our villages, “Jo Satha So Pata”. CRPF has created a place for itself in the nation’s life.

Just now I was watching the parade—Jawans were marching ahead shoulder to shoulder, women units including. The Rapid Action Force is showing its own mettle. The story of sixty years is the saga of hardwork, sincerity, valour and sacrifices, all woven together.

We are supposed to take care of our internal security also, along with external threats. This force has an all important role to play in this regard. This force is always operational in mountains, in plains, in deserts, in dense forests, in remote areas, at borders and helps in maintaining internal security. If I remember correctly, in 1959, its supreme sacrifices in Ladakh forewarned the country against the imminent danger.

Ours is a vast country. There are many religions, modes of worship and many languages. There are different lifestyles. But underlying all this is the thread of unity that has woven us

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi on the occasion of Diamond Jubilee of CRPF, New Delhi, 26 December 1999

together for centuries and upholds us as a powerful chain in every difficult situation.

We got independence 52 years ago. And, we have successfully overcome all the difficulties that came our way after independence. Many crises did crop up but we are overcoming them one after the other.

Just two days back, one of our planes was hijacked. It took off from Kathmandu, it was a passenger aircraft. It was made the target. We are trying to bring back all the passengers safe. We also hope that the plane will also return unharmed. But such types of dangers demand that we should be cautious, we should remain ever vigilant.

We want peace, we want fraternity but this should not be interpreted as our failure to rightly assess others' plans. Intentions of other should be rightly evaluated. A deep vigil should be maintained on the overall situation. We have to maintain internal security by keeping all the security forces at our disposal, on the full alert and vigilant. We have to create such a situation so that there is no threat to our boundaries from outside.

CRPF has an important place in our security setup. I am glad to see that CRPF is fulfilling this responsibility. It is the Government's duty to keep CRPF in perfect trim. The day-to-day difficulties in its ways should be removed. Due care should be taken of the personnel. We are taking proper care and will continue to do so. I want to assure you in this regard. I congratulate all those who have been honoured and won awards for their bravery. Other Jawans will be inspired by their acts and show valour in the respective fields of action and do their duty towards the country.

We have adopted the path of democracy. Despite difficulties, we have sustained the system. We are committed to human rights, we want total sense of brotherhood in the country so that people can live harmoniously. There is no such

problem, which could not be solved by peaceful dialogue. But a strict vigil should be maintained on anti-national elements. We cannot allow anyone to play with our unity and sovereignty. Police forces of states along with Central Police Forces have a role to play here. With mutual understanding and cooperation, everyone should fulfil his duty, supplementing each other. This is very essential.

The new millennium is waiting to welcome us. We want that this millennium should bring in the message of peace and prosperity. But it is also necessary to be always on alert for peace. Our ancestors, our forefathers prayed "*Rashtre Jagriyama*". They did not ask for wealth from God. They did not seek money, nor did they seek weapons. They asked for awakening—"Rashtre Jagriyama"—Let us all in the nation be awake. We should be ready to face any sudden danger. If somebody deceitfully tries to attack our land, we should be prepared to throw them out. "Awakening"—This is the mantra of democracy. "Awakening"—This is the key to security. A little indifference or negligence can create such situation that may demand a massive sacrifice for restoration.

I congratulate you all on the occasion of the anniversary. I felicitate you. Sabharwalji had mentioned about CRPF welfare fund. Today, on this occasion, I announce a grant of Rs. 2 crore towards it. Home Minister Shri Advaniji is present, I told him that it is your internal matter, you tackle it. He said that 'no', this is the sixtieth anniversary, there is need of a little assistance from outside.

Gandhi Peace Prize for Babasaheb Amte

GANDHI PEACE PRIZE is being awarded to Baba Saheb Amte. I congratulate Baba Saheb for this and express my deep regards to him. It reminds me of Bhishma Pitamah of Mahabharata to see him in the lying posture like this. But there is a difference. Bhishma Pitamah fought for Kauravas. Baba Saheb Amte has always advocated justice. Bhishma Pitamah had said—"Arthasya Purusho Dasa". When he was asked as he believed in noble deeds, then why did he help Kauravas? "Arthasya Purusho Dasa"—Man is a slave of riches was the answer. But Baba Saheb never did such slavery. He gave away all his wealth and earnings for the good social cause. And as if in a trance Baba Saheb devoted himself, to serve the leprosy patients to strengthen the nation's unity.

His persona is not confined to mere awards. But I know that Gandhi Peace Prize would mean a lot to him. Right from childhood, he was filled with the Gandhian thoughts. He contributed to the freedom struggle and devoted himself to the service of people. Service not in the form of pity, service not for mercy,—one who is being served should not feel inferior, the patient who is being helped, being treated, should retain self-respect, and during treatment he can be self-dependent—this system, a unique state of working was evolved by Baba Saheb.

In the remote tribal region of Chandrapur, amidst the hills, Baba Saheb marched forward with the commitment to serve the tribals. And the jungle, barely accessible, devoid of proper living conditions then, is now Anand Van. After reading about Baba Saheb, I wish to go to Anand Van at least once, and I will try to do that.

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi while presenting the Gandhi Peace Prize, New Delhi, 14 January 2000

Many efforts are being made to eradicate Leprosy from the country. But they are limited only to the treatment. And, it is not a contagious disease, Leprosy has been conquered. It is in no way concerned with personal contact. People are still unaware of this fact. But while treated person should be self-reliant, be self-dependent by having small vocations and self-respect; this miracle has been shown by Baba Saheb, he set an example before all of us.

Baba Saheb is a compassionate poet too. He is sensitive, feels the suffering, then try to overcome it. He is firm on the matters that he thinks are right. Despite the differences, he never embitters the relations. A few months ago he came to Delhi. He was not treated properly. But I believe that Baba Saheb must not be having any bitterness in his heart. He says hands shall rise to build, not to kill. I would like to quote a few lines from his poem—he said, one should not beg or borrow, one should be self-reliant and live with self-respect. Two lines of a Marathi poem—"Pankhana kshitiz nasate. Tyanna Fakt Jhepechya Kavet Maavnare Aahwan Asate." Wings don't have limits, they are only supposed to fly high. There is a challenge. How high they can reach, is the call.

Today Baba Saheb is among us. We are truly blessed to have honoured him. Once again, I congratulate him. Just now, he was telling me his age. I don't think of him to be so old. But even at his age he is working fantastically—Unite India, don't break, unite. And the mission of uniting India, from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and from Itanagar to Okha, has come forth all along.

At present he is settled on the banks of Narmada, I have the confidence that he will find a solution so that the construction project on Narmada which is due, gets completed and also the people who are being displaced, get properly rehabilitated.

Religion is the Science of Living

BY GOOD LUCK I see you all nearly after a year. I am happy to know that incessant is the advancement of the religious chariot. The wheel of religion ought to move ahead. A religion is characterized by incessant movement. Move on. Never sit idle. Do not sit with hands locked up, move constantly. Movement is life. I witness the saintly ladies avowed to walk bare foot. Weather would not obstruct as they are constantly moving. It is rightful to walk on the right path, to follow the religious way.

Religion in a *mantra* which lifts up, vitalizes, creates understanding and induces helpfulness. There are many systems of adoration, there are different ways of worship, and they all lead to one and the same goal. The dimensions may be diverse, the views may be variegated, but the Creation would be the same. Ours is a country of religions. There is no discrimination here. There have been discussions regarding the ways of worship, but this country has always been distinguished by accepting the truth presented by the opposite side.

It is good news that Bhagavan Rishabhadev's Nirvana ceremonies are being held. There had been 24 Tirthankaras. All of them are respectable, worth worshipping, though we have insufficient knowledge about all of them. Mataji has just now apprised me of the fact that some scholars mistake Bhagavan Mahavira as the founder of Jainism, while, as a matter of fact He was the 24th Tirthankara, with 23 Tirthankaras as his predecessors. In my official chamber there is an image of

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi at the Bhagwan Rishabh Dev International Nirvana Function, New Delhi, 4 February 2000

Tirthankara Parasnath, whom many of the visitors are not able to identify. We should try to know about the great men and the gods.

Our life is said to be an art of living. Life, of course, is an art of living, but it is also a science of living; art and science are not separate. And I have been going through the six *Sutras*, repeatedly referred here. The first one '*asi*' meaning a sword, a weapon for defence. *Asi* is the basic need for defence, for the protection of religion, for protection of the country. '*Asi*' is placed first because it is needed to fight the wild animals destroying the crops which have to be protected. For safety from the hostile neighbours, weapons are needed. Our weapon would stop the enemy from any misadventure.

Thereafter is placed the *Sutra*, '*masi*'. '*Masi*', the ink, is needed for writing. These days we are celebrating the 'Literacy Day' and are on the march to make the whole of India a literate country. There would have been no illiteracy in the country if it had not been under foreign rule. Agriculture, finance, commerce, handicraft, technology, industry etc. have been here since thousands of years. We will find references to them even now. This country, the soil of this country has never seen life in fragments, but as a whole. This wholeness in life is the essence of this country which is why it is in existence since thousands of years. The strength of this country is even now recognized. This country is all set to become a great power. This has been accepted both by our friends and foes. We should proceed with determination to bring success to every living being by treading the moral path and with the support of religion.

I have come here to receive the blessings which I got profusely and which I will cherish. Blessings are needed so that we can follow the right path firmly. The call of duty sometimes creates dilemma. The same type of situation was created when the aircraft was hijacked. I would not have hesitated even for

a moment in sacrificing my family members' and my near and dear ones had they been the occupants of the aircraft. But the passengers were the citizens of India. They had boarded from a foreign land and stranded in a foreign land. Even bloodshed could not have saved them. Hence that decision was taken with a very heavy heart. Even though I was a target of criticism, I wished to save the lives of the innocent people. Hijacking is not an act of bravery. Real act of bravery was to get the Kargil hills vacated from the intruders. They had taken positions atop the hills. Our jawans stayed at the foothills and they had to scale great heights. Duty was the need of the hour and it was fulfilled by the jawans. Steering the country through the crisis was possible only with the cooperation of the people. Envy and our growing strength and prosperity conspiracies are being hatched. Efforts are being made to send fake currency on a large scale into the country to dislocate our economy. But we have been successfully facing every challenge. For this we need cooperation from everyone; blessings of the holy personages and of God.

You have invited me here, I am grateful to you. I pray to God for enabling me to prove myself worthy of your blessings.

India is Proud of Your Achievements

I AM HAPPY to be present at this conference on the Contribution by the people of Indian Origin. I heartily congratulate the Antar-Rashtriya Sahyog Parishad for organizing it.

This is perhaps the first conference of the PIOs to be held in the new century. The credit for this goes to Shri Baleshwar Agarwal and his associates.

Persons of Indian Origin live in almost every country of the world. They have made their mark in an increasing number of professions and occupations. Wherever they are, they have earned a good name for themselves and for their mother country—India—with their hard work, talent and, of course, their loyalty to the country that they are citizens of. The story of the journey of our people to all parts of the world is an amazing one. It is a story of great courage and character. It tells the tale:

- Of indentured labourers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh taken to various British colonies all over the world;
- Of Gujarati traders who sailed to various parts of Africa;
- Of Sikh farmers who went to the United States and Canada nearly a hundred years back;
- Of Tamil workers and entrepreneurs who went to Singapore and Malaysia; and
- Of Sindhi businessmen who went to Thailand and Hong Kong.

It is also the story of bright, young Indian engineers,

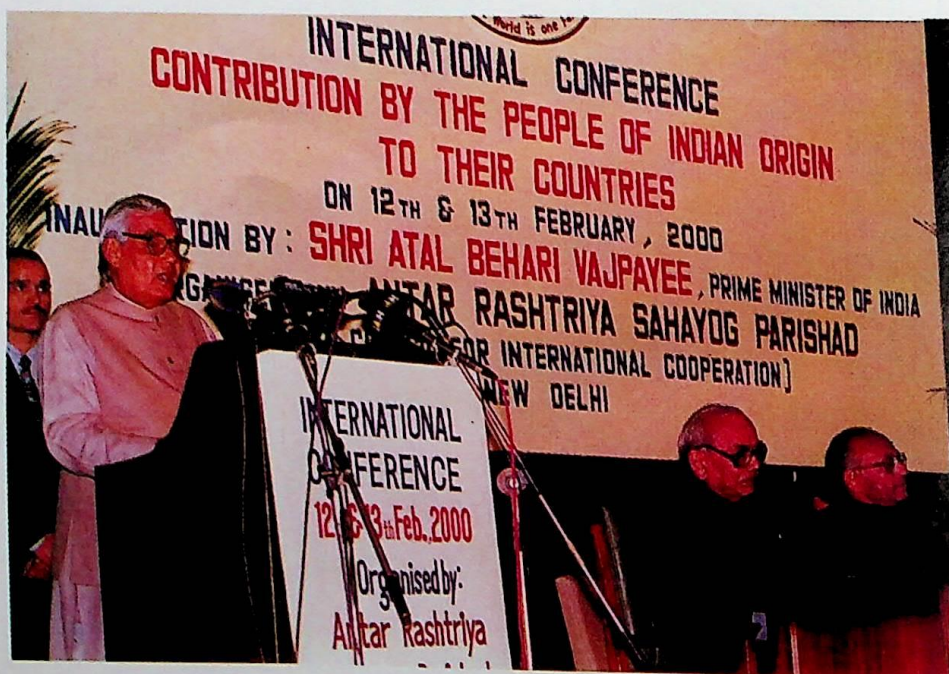
Speech at the Conference on the Contribution by the people of Indian Origin, New Delhi, 12 February 2000

doctors, and other professionals who went to the United States and the United Kingdom in the '60s, '70s, and '80s. They were followed in the '90s by software programmers, many of whom have now become world-beating businessmen.

Wherever they have gone, Indians have always enriched and fertilized their country of adoption. They have contributed to the economic prosperity and cultural heritage of their host countries.

I am told that there are about forty countries in the world, in each of which the Indian population exceeds fifty thousand. There are many more countries where the Indian population may be less, but their presence is no less noteworthy.

Perhaps there is no other nation in the world that has such a widely dispersed diaspora. This is a matter of pride for all of us—for Indians as well as PIOs.



Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee speaking at the conference on the contribution by the people of Indian origin, New Delhi, 12 February 2000

This outstanding contribution of PIOs is due to India's strong culture and traditions. Our civilization is founded on the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—the entire world is one family.

Wherever our sisters and brothers have gone, they have preserved the essential family and social values in their own communities, and also spread them in the larger community that they are part of.

Friends, if we look back, there are various forces of history that prompted our people to leave India and settle abroad. This kind of trans-national movement of people will only accelerate in the increasingly inter-dependent and inter-connected world of the 21st century.

The expansion of the Indian diaspora in the new century and the new millennium, however, will follow a very different trajectory. In the past, people left India out of distress or some economic compulsion, because ours was then a country under colonial subjugation.

This will no longer be the case in the future.

India is now not only a free country, but is marching ahead confidently to occupy its rightful place in the comity of developed nations of the world. Never again will any Indian have to leave our shores for distant alien lands out of want and deprivation. Rather, as is already happening, it will be because of the legendary knowledge and talent of Indians that they will go in increasing numbers to work and to live in foreign lands.

We are seeing yet another difference. In the past, many of the Indians who went abroad had to work in the lower rungs of the economic ladder in their host countries. Now, they are rapidly climbing up the value chain. It is a matter of pride that many Indians are now heading large banks, airlines, consultancy firms, and, of course, information technology companies abroad.

Persons of Indian origin are among the richest in many countries. I am sure that this phenomenon will only gain momentum in the coming years.

As the PIOs and NRIs become more and more prosperous, they are looking to India as an attractive place for investment and doing business. I assure you that the Government will facilitate this process in every possible way.

Friends, now the time has come when your economic strength and professional achievements should begin to be matched by your voice and influence in politics, culture, and the social life of your adopted countries.

You should also participate responsibly and effectively in your country's political life by supporting every worthwhile political cause. It is a matter of happiness that many persons of Indian origin are beginning to play leading roles in governments and political parties abroad. This process, however, is so far slow and needs to be accelerated.

The Government sees the PIOs not just as investors, but also as our links with the rest of the world. We would like you to play the role of our unofficial ambassadors by communicating the reality of a new and resurgent India to the political, cultural, business, and intellectual establishments in your host countries.

Whenever the need and the occasion arise, we would like you to strongly articulate India's case to the various constituencies in your adopted countries. I am happy that this is what you indeed did during the Kargil war and, more recently, during the hijack crisis.

I would urge you to do this on a more sustained basis over issues such as India's stand on Kashmir, our strong secular tradition and state-sponsored terrorism, which has actually become a menace to global peace and security.

Today's India is a self-confident India marching ahead to economic prosperity and social justice and equality. Today's India is ready to play its part in shaping a new and equitable international order. While we will not brook interference in our internal affairs or allow others to meddle in our bilateral relations or problems, we are ready to engage with any country in a cooperative framework.

Friends, let me conclude by stating once again that India is proud of your achievements. More and more Indians—both in India and abroad—are succeeding. In the new century that has just begun, let us together resolve to make India succeed.

Bhagat Singh— The Great Martyr

WRITING A BOOK, especially a book based on historical details, is by no means an easy job. Often, it involves hard labour, more so because documents are not easy to come by.

Shri Kuldip Nayar has obviously put in a lot of hard work while writing his new book, *The Martyr: Bhagat Singh—Experiments in Revolution*. With few contemporaries alive to render the oral history of the life and times of Shahid Bhagat Singh and official records difficult to trace, it must have taken a great deal of effort to put together the story of this brave revolutionary, who became a legend in his lifetime and continues to remain a hero of India's freedom struggle.

I got a copy of the book yesterday afternoon and have read portions of it. I commend Shri Nayar's effort. I also commend the publishers, Har-Anand, for doing an excellent job in publishing this book.

As we all know, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were hanged on March 23, 1931. They were given the death sentence in the Lahore conspiracy case. By all accounts it was a farcical trial. The British Governor-General promulgated an ordinance to establish a special tribunal to try the Lahore conspiracy case, while denying the accused the right of appeal to the High

Speech while releasing the book "*The Martyr: Bhagat Singh—Experiments in Revolution*" by Kuldip Nayar, New Delhi, 25 February 2000

Court. It was nothing but outright abuse of the judicial process.

Shahid Bhagat Singh's story has a lesson for all of us in contemporary India. He had serious political differences with Lala Lajpat Rai, but these differences did not in any way diminish his respect for Lalaji.

Lala Lajpat Rai was brutally beaten up by the Superintendent of Police, J. S. Scott, while leading a demonstration against the Simon Commission. He died of fatal injuries on November 17, 1928. Enraged by this brutality, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev and Chandra Shekhar Azad decided to avenge Lala Lajpat Rai's death by killing Scott.

In the event, it was another police officer, Saunders, who was shot dead by them in a case of mistaken identity.

The British were left clueless about this killing and, in all probability, Bhagat Singh would never have been arrested and executed if he had not decided to throw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8th April, 1929, to protest against two draconian Bills. Ironically, it was a poster proclaiming why the British police officer was killed, hand-written by Bhagat Singh, which enabled the British to pin Saunders' killing on Bhagat Singh and his comrades.

History tells us that the three young men showed neither remorse nor fear while they were being taken to the gallows at Lahore Central Jail, but happily embraced death, shouting "Inquilab Zindabad".

Shri Nayar's book is both a tribute to Shahid Bhagat Singh as well as a contribution to the limited history of Indian revolutionaries whose role in the freedom struggle has often been either ignored or minimized.

While commending Shri Nayar's efforts to tell the story Bhagat Singh's daring revolutionary acts, I wish to add that I disagree with the author's views on either the Bengal revolutionaries or the Maharashtra revolutionaries, especially the Chapekar brothers or Veer Savarkar. Bengal revolutionaries,

for instance, those who belonged to Anushilan Samiti, and their compatriots in Maharashtra were as fiercely patriotic as anybody else and were motivated by a single purpose—freedom of their motherland from oppressive British rule.

Indeed, revolutionaries like Surya Sen, Aurobindo Ghosh, Ashfaqulla Khan, and Ram Prasad Bismil had fired the imagination of the young generation of their time and continue to inspire today's generation. The mass protests against the partition of Bengal by Curzon, in many ways, laid the foundation of the struggle for "swadeshi", "swabhiman", and "swaraj", inspiring both radicals and those who subscribed to Gandhi's non-violence.

With these words, I am happy to release the first copy of Shri Nayar's book and commend it to all those who are interested in the history of India's struggle for freedom.

Khalsa Panth—Embodiment of Valour

I AM IMMENSELY pleased to inaugurate the exhibition on "Shraddha Aur Vaibhav, Sikh Kala—Birsa" amidst all of you here. This exhibition is a part of the tercentenary celebrations of the founding of the Khalsa Faith. A debate was going on as to what should be the equivalent term for 'piety' in Hindi. Someone suggested it should be devotion. Another said it should be reverential belief. Differences continued among the scholars and the issue remained unresolved. But my submission is that we shall have to coin a term, which may amalgamate devotion, reverential belief and dedication. This exhibition will go a long way in unraveling our Sikh heritage.

Free rendering of the speech in Hindi at the inauguration of an exhibition on "Shraddha aur Vaibhav, Sikh Kala—Birsa", New Delhi, 14 March 2000

Guru Gobind Singhji Maharaj founded the Khalsa Panth in 1699 by administering nectar to his five devotees, the *Panji Piaras*, who were of different creeds and hailed from different regions of the country. This way he perpetuated the universal preaching and teachings of Guru Nanakdevji who had visualized a new civilization based on the sublimity of human spirit and the existence of a common universal soul in entire humanity. This fundamental essence of Guru Nanakji's teachings is as much relevant today as it was 300 years ago when Guru Gobind Singhji had founded the Khalsa Panth.

Guru Gobind Singhji brought about a revolution in the thinking process of men and women of his time. The Khalsa Faith filled in a new ray of hope among the poor, weaker and the deprived sections of society. It aroused self-respect and self-confidence among them and created a strong will power among them to live with dignity. By founding the Khalsa Panth the Guru Maharaj eliminated the distinction between the high and the low and the mighty and the suppressed ones. Also, he brought men and women on par. The Khalsa Faith instilled in its followers a sense of discipline and character building. It transformed the common men and women into enthusiastic and dynamic entities. The Sikhs undoubtedly made their excellent contribution in every field of nation building during the Freedom Struggle and after the country's Independence.

The founding of the Khalsa Faith is being celebrated the world over. To celebrate this eventful chapter of our history the Government has launched certain schemes and projects. This exhibition is one of them.

The epithets of *Shraddha* i.e. reverential belief and *Vaibhav* i.e. grandeur, attached to this exhibition are apt indeed because both aspects complement each other. They are like golden threads to tag the pages of Sikh history. In this exhibition there are pictures portraying the significant events in the lives of Guru Nanak and the other Gurus. The sword and *katar* of Guru Gobind Singh, the sword and shield of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his jewel-studded varied dresses on display here

show that the Sikh Gurus, especially the personality of Guru Gobind Singh, was full of devotion, valour and grandeur.

This exhibition is being organized to honour the true spirit of Sikhism and to give us a deep insight into the Sikh history and culture. Even then the best way to honour Guru Gobind Singh is that we evaluate his ideals and approach and strengthen our belief in them. Come, let us reiterate our faith in the concept of universal fraternity and make India a more powerful, progressive and developed country.

Once again, I compliment the National Museum on organising this beautiful exhibition to mark the tercentenary celebration of the founding of the Khalsa Panth. Just now the Minister for culture has announced that this exhibition will be taken to important places in the country—to the places where history was written. Our countrymen will be able to see it and derive inspiration. The new generation will also be able to get enriching moral lessons.

Now I have to make an announcement. There has been a demand that we should endeavour to procure and bring home all mementos and memorabilia related to Sikh history and its great personalities, which are lying, scattered in different countries around the world. Some efforts were made earlier with partial success. But still there are many mementos, which will be sources of inspiration if brought here. They will not only be items for viewing but also throbbing symbols which could stir the soul and mind. We have heard a lot about the throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. That throne is now difficult to procure in its original form. I cannot even say with confidence whether it exists or not. But its replica is ready. It was made almost in the same period and is available with us. We are presenting it to the Punjab Government so that it should remain secure in Punjab and should be aptly revered there.

With these words I warmly compliment the organizers of this exhibition. May this exhibition influence the souls and minds of the people.

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